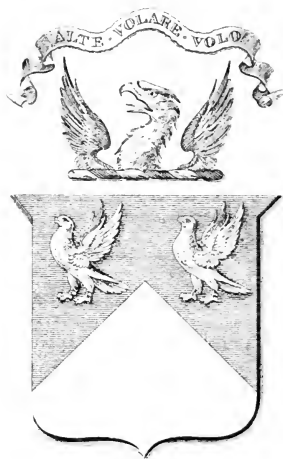


THE BOW
OF FATE

H. M. GREENHOW.

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THE BOW OF FATE



THE BOW OF FATE

BY

SURGEON-MAJOR H. M. GREENHOW

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LONDON

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BY MORSE STEPHENS

TO THE MEMORY
OF
A DEAR SISTER
I DEDICATE THIS STORY.

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THE BOW OF FATE.

CHAPTER I.

OTTERINGTON GRANGE.

IT was a merry party that assembled that autumn at Otterington, and not the least merry amongst them was Sir George Spencer himself. The old Baronet seemed never so happy as when he had round him a circle of young people, and since his wife's death, some years ago, he had been careful to have always a girl friend to stay with his daughter Edith, who would otherwise have found life almost insupportable in that remote corner of Northumberland, where hunting and shooting were almost the only amusements during the dull season of the year.

The afternoon was drawing to a close, yet the gentlemen had not returned from a beat of some far-distant covers, and it was evident the two girls sitting in the drawing-room were wondering at their prolonged absence.

“What a day they must have had, Edith!” said the younger, leaving her chair and going to the window. “Rain all the morning, and then this terrible mist, which envelops everything.”

“Yes, indeed, they have been unlucky; and I am so sorry, because it is about the last day they will have,” answered Edith Spencer. “Oh, Lily, I begin to feel terribly sad!”

“Poor dear!” cried the other girl, whose name was Lilian Langford, coming back and throwing her arms round her cousin. “One can’t wonder at that, but then these jolly times could not last for ever.”

“But to lose you all at one fell swoop is too dreadful to contemplate.”

Lilian laughed.

“You had better come with us,” she said, “and

try what a dose of sunshine would do for you. The more I see of this climate of yours the less I like its damp and fogs and snows."

"And what would become of my dear father if I were to leave him, and of the people here, oh, cousin of mine?" demanded Edith Spencer, stroking the girl's dark and glossy hair affectionately. "We are not all so free as you are, nor so completely our own mistresses."

"I don't know about that," murmured Lilian, shrugging her shoulders; "I'm not altogether sure——"

A curious figure at this moment stole silently into the room, and, bowing low, stood with hands joined together in an attitude of the utmost deference. Of a light brown colour, this man's features were decidedly handsome, and there was the mark of the high caste of a Brahmin on his forehead. He wore clothes of the purest white, with a turban wound round his head after the fashion of the natives of India.

"Protector of the poor, all is ready in the large

chamber," he said in a strange tongue, which however was understood by Lilian.

"Very good, Bhagut ; Miss Spencer and I will come presently," returned she, in the same mysterious jargon.

As the man, again salaaming low, retired, Edith said, smiling—

"Really, Lily, that bearer of yours is a trying person. Just as one fancies one is in the deepest privacy and free from interruption, he enters in the most insinuating manner, and stands statue-like, evidently taking in every detail of the situation !"

"Poor Bhagut !" answered the girl. "He is the most excellent old creature imaginable, and has the utmost admiration for you, Edith."

"I suppose it's only his way, and means nothing ; but I'm sure I could never get to like it—or to like him, for the matter of that."

"Now there you are prejudiced, Edith," the girl replied with some warmth. "Did you not notice how respectfully he waited till I signed to him to speak ?"

"That, to me, makes it only the worse, for one feels disarmed by his humility, and yet all the while angry at his intrusion," rejoined Edith, with tenacity.

"His way is not your way—that is all, my dear. What ~~should~~ I have done—what would have happened to me, if it had not been for old Bhagut? When my father and mother both died during that terrible cholera time in the Punjab, it was he who took care of me and preserved me, carrying me off to his own country, where cholera was unknown."

"Well, that was really good of him, Lily, and of course we all feel deeply indebted to him," said Edith, gravely. "You were a little thing in those days, and perhaps on some accounts it might have been better for you to have come home at once. I rather wonder they did not send you over."

"I have always understood my dear mother's friends, most of them of the purest Rajpoot blood, rather wished to maintain some hold over me," replied Lilian. "And, besides, though we talk of

home, Edith, and, from your point of view mean England, I can hardly think of mine otherwise than as in India."

"And yet you call yourself an Englishwoman!" returned her cousin. "But there," seeing how the poor girl's colour rose, "I meant nothing, and beg your pardon, darling, for I'm more annoyed with myself than I can tell for speaking so."

She turned and caressed Lilian affectionately, but it was evident the taunt, unintentional as it was, had told.

"My father, you know, was an English officer," said the girl quietly, though her dark eyes flashed beneath their long lashes, "and of that I am proud, as I am bound to be; moreover, had it not been for him I should not have owned your cousinship, Edith, nor have had the happiness of looking on Otterington as my English home."

"Now, that was sweetly said," cried Edith Spencer, "and makes me feel all the more ashamed of myself!"

"And yet," continued Lilian, "my mother's

people were, I have heard, terribly troubled at her marriage, and of course made her an outcast from among them. None are prouder of their blood than the sun-descended Rajpoots, nor, indeed, have the right to be."

"I have often heard that said, and suppose it may be true, but we in the West know so little really of their feelings and prejudices," rejoined Edith.

"That is perfectly true," said her cousin, with an amused smile; "and it is not to be expected that you should enter into such small matters as these, which after all concern only some few millions of people thousands of miles away."

"Bravo! my gentle cousin, that is a very fair retort, and one that I fully deserve," cried Edith, in her turn laughing good-humouredly. "But now, won't Bhagut be growing impatient? for I gathered he came just now to summon us to the music-room."

"Yes," said Lilian, "I had almost forgotten; let us go at once!"

They passed out together, as beautiful a pair of girls as you could wish to see, though totally differing from each other in nearly every respect—Edith, golden-haired, violet-eyed, with that fluctuating blush on her fair cheek which comes and goes one hardly knows why ; her figure tall, but slight and lithe ; her every movement graceful ; Lilian, a decided brunette, with splendid soft black eyes and rather markedly aquiline features, a noble carriage, and a wonderfully low voice and engaging manner.

The music-room had evidently been completely transformed, for a stage had been erected at the further end furnished with footlights and a curtain ; and the carpenter was now only waiting for final orders from his young mistress, which she was giving in a few words, having turned to Lilian to ask her advice about the drawing back of the curtain, when a noise in the hall announced the return of the sportsmen.

“Why, bless my soul, Edith, you have indeed made a change here !” cried Sir George, standing

in the doorway and looking critically towards the stage, over the rows of chairs ; “ one would think you were going to act some elaborate play, instead of having only a few tableaux to amuse our friends.”

“ Well, papa, I thought we might as well have the thing complete, and the stage and curtain will be useful some other time.”

“ I wonder when you next will have an entertainment here, Miss Spencer?” said a good-looking young fellow at Sir George’s side, who carried his gun over his arm ; “ I fear Walter and Miss Langford and I may not have the pleasure of being present at one for many a long day.”

“ Ah ! Captain Slingsby,” said the girl, colouring faintly, “ that is, indeed, too true.”

“ Just a repetition of what Edith has been saying to me in the drawing-room,” exclaimed Lilian. “ How odd that you two should be thinking of the same thing just at this time ! ”

Edith looked almost distressed, and perhaps it was to conceal a feeling of embarrassment on his

part that Slingsby, muttering something about its being necessary for him to see after his tableau-dress, effected his retreat, and was followed by the rest of the party, for dinner was to be early, as the guests from outside were to arrive in good time.

Several gentlemen were staying at The Grange, of whom the principal was this Captain Edward Slingsby, of the Lucknow Lancers, a close friend of Walter Spencer, Edith's brother and Sir George's heir. Both young men being in the Army, were on the point of going out to India, where Slingsby had already spent several years. Lilian Langford's passage had been taken by the same ship, for she was to be under the charge of Mrs. Davis, an old friend about to rejoin her husband, General Davis, in Bengal.

.

Most of the tableaux had been exhibited with great success. Douglas had kissed Queen Mary's hand, Raleigh had thrown down his cloak for Elizabeth to tread on, Edith Spencer, as Juliet, had

smiled sweetly from her window on Slingsby, who looked an ideal Romeo ; Nelson had died in Hardy's arms, the ghost of Hamlet's father had stood upon the stage, "while one with moderate haste might tell a hundred"—when the curtain rose upon a curious scene. In the centre sat a man of brown complexion, dressed as a native of India, with his hands extended before him, while on his right, also sitting, was placed a woman of a lighter hue, covered for the most part by a white sārī, which hung in picturesque folds over her, and on his other side a boy of a darker colour and roguish expression of face. The audience was evidently puzzled by this group, for whispers were heard on every hand—"What is this scene?" "Who are they?" "What does it mean?" Nor were they much the wiser when the woman and the boy, breaking through the hitherto strictly tableau programme of the evening, commenced to play, the former on a stringed sitār, the latter on a native drum, with which instruments they appeared to be thoroughly familiar.

But now there really took place an interesting episode, for from out of the bare floor in front of the man, whose arms and hands were moving over it, arose by an almost imperceptible growth a plant which, as the music became faster and the motions of the conjuror more and more determined, gradually attained the height of between three and four feet, spreading out to the fulness of a complete tree, with numerous branches and a close covering of fresh leaves, amid which a fine crop of rich yellow fruit could be discerned.

"Mangoes, and no mistake about them!" cried Sir George, in a stage whisper which could be heard all over the room.

"Wonderful—most wonderful!" said Lady Digby, sitting next him. "I have heard of this, but of course never saw it before."

"Is it a real tree?" asked someone behind.

"I will soon prove that," said Walter Spencer, stepping on to the stage and plucking half-a-dozen of the luscious fruit, and handing them round. "You see, ladies and gentlemen, there is no

deception, and the crop of mangoes is perpetually growing!"

The applause was warm as the curtain presently fell on this unexpected scene, there being a loud and general call for the actors in it; and when Lilian Langford—for it was she who had personated the woman in native dress—and old Bhagut, and the boy Kulloo, another servant of Lilian, appeared to make their bow, they were received with a general and prolonged clapping of hands. This may, indeed, be said to have been the success of the evening, and many were the compliments that reached Miss Langford on the part she had borne in it.

"Nay," she said, deprecatingly, "I did nothing but play an instrument I have been accustomed to since I was a child. It is Bhagut, who brought his knowledge of jugglery into play with such good effect, that you must thank; Kulloo and I were mere subordinates."

It did not seem that the boy, who was now gravely handing round ices to the company, was

quite of the same opinion, for his pugaree had assumed a more jaunty air than usual, and his ears and eyes were evidently open to the notice that he excited. It was, indeed, a proud night for Kulloo !

CHAPTER II.

GARDEN REACH.

"THERE, Lily, you win the sweep!" exclaimed Walter Spencer, as the anchor dropped, and the good ship *Indus* was brought to her moorings off Champaul Ghaut.

"How lucky!" said Lilian; "but there could not have been much time to spare?"

"Why, no, of course not; but that is in the nature of the thing. You see one counts," continued he, "from the moment they let go the anchor, and in this case you have won by a good half-minute."

"I'm so glad, Miss Langford, to have to make over your winnings to you," said Edward Slingsby, coming up with a bag of rupees in his hand, "and

feel sure, from what I hear, all the subscribers to the sweep are pleased also."

"It is very kind of you to say so," answered she, taking possession of the bag; "but I really hardly know what to do with so much money."

"Oh, your man Bhagut will relieve you of it; and now we really are at Calcutta you will soon fall into your old ways of making him your purse-bearer," replied the young officer.

"And what a comfort," said she, laughing, "that will be. No danger of having one's pocket picked now, and perfect confidence that Bhagut can at any moment produce any required sum from his cummerbund, or whatever mysterious receptacle he uses as a cash-box."

So saying, she gave the bag into the bearer's keeping, while the mischievous Kulloo, laden with a variety of Hindoo cooking-utensils, lotahs, and other things, stood by, smiling and showing his wonderful teeth.

The morning was a bright and beautiful one, and as they had passed the charming villas and

lovely lawns and shrubberies of Garden Reach, and had noted the feathery bamboos and tamarind trees which grew there, the passengers, exiles though they might consider themselves, had involuntarily confessed that their first impressions of the "City of Palaces" were of the happiest. Now, there was all the excitement of the meeting with friends who were waiting for them, and who came on board to greet and carry them off on shore; not, however, before they had said regretful "good-byes" to the officers of the good ship which had brought them so safely to port, and to many a pleasant acquaintance they might never see again.

As Lilian waited on the deck she was amused at the noise and confusion around, the jabbering of Hindostani and Bengali, the shouts of the boatmen anxious for passengers by their frail-looking dinghies, the frantic gesticulations of the drivers of gharries and carriages of all sorts, standing on the bank hoping to secure fares to the city.

"You expect Colonel Scott to meet you?" asked Slingsby, who had been getting together

his baggage and chartering a boat to take him off.

"Yes," answered she, "and he does not seem to be here at present. But I have told Mrs. Davis I am all right, so she is going on shore with the General at once."

"The Colonel is certain to turn up directly, as he is a most punctual man, that I can answer for, having been so many years in his regiment," said he.

"Ah, here he is!" cried Lilian, moving forward, as a slight but active-looking figure, with a white head and bronzed complexion, hurried towards her. "How do you do, dear uncle; perhaps you hardly know me again?"

"To be sure I do, my child; to be sure I do! Why, you *are* grown in these three years, and I need not ask about health, for the voyage has evidently suited you well."

He kissed her affectionately, then turned, exclaiming—

"How are you, Slingsby? I'm very glad you are back, for we want you with the regiment."

"Thank you, sir ; I shall not be sorry to rejoin. I hope you are all well in the Lancers?"

"Yes, flourishing. Ah, there is that bearer of yours, Lily—what's his name? brother of our Russaldar, Ram Dyall."

"Old Bhagut!" she said, smiling, as the man silently salaamed low.

"He is looking thin, having, no doubt, lived on parched grain and water since your voyage began. Well," speaking in Hindostani, "you can have a full meal to-day, Bhagut, and a good hookah after it!"

Again the bearer gravely bent low, while Kulloo, just behind, grinned from ear to ear.

"This is my cousin, Walter Spencer, who has come out to join his regiment," said Lilian, presenting Spencer to the Colonel.

"I'm delighted to see you, sir, as your father's son. Welcome to India, which you won't find such a bad place after all. And how is Sir George?—well, I hope, and as cheery as he used to be years ago when I knew him?"

"Yes, sir," answered Walter, "my father wears well, and has, I hope, many a long year before him yet."

"I hope so, I hope so. Now, Lily, are you ready for shore? If so we'll go off at once, and then I hope you'll be able to start to-morrow for Jahmere."

"There is not much to be done in Calcutta, I dare say, uncle?" said she, smiling.

"No, nothing at all; a most stupid place," answered the Colonel, impatiently. "The only sight is 'the course' of an evening, when people are all out driving and riding; but there are just now no horses worth seeing, and as to the people themselves—well, the less said the better."

They all laughed, especially Slingsby, who had a question to ask.

"Well, Colonel, you won't object to my remaining here a few days, as I want to see some friends, and also to show Spencer what there is to be looked at in the capital of India?"

"Oh, of course not, Slingsby; take as long as

you please, only don't ask me to keep you company."

"Or even Miss Langford," suggested Slingsby, looking slyly at Lilian.

"I have seen all the sights here," said she, "and really agree very much with my uncle."

"Then we shall meet you both before long, gentlemen, for I understand Mr. Spencer's regiment is the Red Dirks, now, as you know, at Jahmere."

By the smiles which greeted this speech of the Colonel it was evidently an agreeable one to his hearers, and they parted with anticipations of soon meeting happily again at the distant station for which they were bound.

.

In those days the travelling up the Grand Trunk road from Calcutta was performed in carriages drawn by small country horses, each stage being about six miles long. The gharry was generally arranged so that the passenger could lie flat in it, his light bedding forming a useful buffer against the jolting that was invariably experienced, while in

the well below the seats was stowed away whatever might be useful on the journey in the way of clothing, a few books and writing materials, or any of the hundred-and-one articles that are necessary to an Englishman's comfort. On the top were packed the portmanteaus and trunks, containing the heavier possessions of the traveller, together with a servant or two, and now and then, when for instance a young child required fresh milk at short notice, a goat may have been quartered there, and have made the journey with much equanimity. The degree of comfort of this mode of travelling depended very much on the quality of the horses supplied, and sometimes a long trip was accomplished quite easily, while, at others, if unbroken and restive animals were used, the start might be delayed, the carriage might be turned round on its own axis two or three times, the coachman whipping, the syce hallooing and gesticulating fiercely, till, after a violent jerk, the traveller felt himself carried on with a swaying motion at a break-neck speed and without a check

to the end of the stage, the only sounds to be heard being the rattling of the gharry, and the triumphant too-tooing of the driver's horn. Occasionally such a thing has been known as to light some straw under a very obstinate horse, the effect being to startle him off, however unwilling he might be to move ; but no such expedients were necessary with the animals which took Lilian Langford and her uncle and their servants rapidly towards the Upper Provinces for which they were bound.

Once, indeed, the girl had a fright. They wished to reach a particular dāk-bungalow, celebrated for its comfortable rooms and accommodation, and therefore travelled late. Darkness had fallen when Lilian, roused on a sudden from her nap, felt as if the earth had given way below her, and was not reassured by hearing Bhagut crying out in piteous tones for mercy, and that he might be saved from a miserable death. Looking out hastily she perceived that her carriage was lying overturned close to the steep edge of a large pond or tank at the side of the road, and that her unfor-

fortunate bearer had had a rude awakening by being suddenly cast from his warm bed on the roof into the unknown depths of the gloomy waters below. Just at this moment Colonel Scott, whose gharry was close behind, drove up, and, taking in the situation with the promptitude of a soldier, flashed the lantern, without which he never travelled, on to the surface of the tank, showing the head of the unfortunate Bhagut, who was struggling desperately among the thick weeds. The boy Kulloo now proved an invaluable help, for, standing on the bank, he rapidly divested himself of his long pugaree, and having tied a stick to one end, threw it to the bearer, who, catching it, was presently drawn ashore by the united efforts of the Colonel and the boy.

“Well done, my lad!” cried the former, as they dragged poor Bhagut up the bank. “That was smart and ready of you, for there was not much time to lose.”

“Hah, sahib,” smiled the youth, “by your favour the poor man has been saved.”

"Deuce a bit by my favour!" returned the Colonel. "But, now, just give him a good rubbing, while I get a drink ready for him which he must take as medicine."

Within three minutes the Colonel was back, bringing with him the draught he had prepared.

"Friend of the poor!" gasped out the shivering bearer, who now, supported by the boy, was sitting up. "Pray assure my young mem-sahib that I will come to her presently."

"All right, my good fellow; just gulp this down, and you'll come round all the quicker."

So saying, he administered his potion, greatly to the satisfaction of both the servants, the patient himself expressing his thanks warmly.

Meantime Lilian's coachman and syce had righted her gharry, whose interior arrangements she soon set straight when reassured of her bearer's safety; and presently Bhagut, wrapped in his warmest clothing, betook himself to his bed on the roof, while Kulloo quite unconcernedly settled into his old corner. The Colonel gave the word, and

off they started again, the coachman winding his horn cheerily, the syce yelling at the top of his voice, and the few villagers who had by this time collected to look on stolidly at the sahib-logue and their incomprehensible proceedings, salaaming respectfully.

They now passed through a range of low hills amid very pretty scenery, and presently came to a country totally different from the moist and green Bengal, the surface of the plain becoming brown and arid though still dotted with trees and strips of jungle ; whilst the air was warm and dry, notwithstanding that in the early morning it often blew fresh and even cold. Instead of tanks at the side of the road there were wells sunk, wherefrom the water was slowly drawn in skinfuls by lazy bullocks, which, yoked in couples, and urged down an inclined plane, pulled the rope to which the skins were attached. Round about each well might be seen a crowd of men, women, and children ; the men washing and drinking or smoking their hookahs, the women filling their red and

yellow vessels and carrying them away carefully poised upon their heads to the village ; the children entirely devoid of clothing, except, perhaps, a cord or strip of calico round the loins, playing happily together and constructing mud-pies from the water and dust in which they were delightedly grovelling. Often, too, on the encamping grounds near the wells, under the shade of the fine topes of mangoe and babul trees, or of some magnificently-spreading peepul, might be remarked a party of travellers, cooking their food or resting after eating, their horses and bullocks and camels tethered near, and finding what grazing they could in the bushes and undergrowth around. Now and again a picturesque train of horsemen was encountered, armed to the teeth with tulwars and daggers of the most varied patterns, and wearing, suspended often from the shoulder, long-barrelled jezails and other varieties of firearms, their gaily-coloured pugarees and variegated coats of warm cloth, or poshteens of sheepskin, giving them a wild and outlandish look

as they rode along. Then, perhaps, followed on horseback, or mounted high on an elephant handsomely caparisoned, some native chief, travelling through the country for pleasure, or on his way to visit a distant and celebrated shrine, accompanied frequently by his women, borne in palkis or in low carts, drawn by majestic Deccani bullocks, and closely veiled and curtained from the vulgar gaze ; the procession closing with a long line of baggage hackeries, or a string of camels patiently treading in each other's steps, and guarded by more weird figures, some on foot, some bestriding their small and wiry steeds. Such brilliant cavalcades, with their wild music, the cries of their camel-drivers and palki bearers, the jingling and flashing of their arms and accoutrements, together with the long trains of bullock-carts and of ekkas and other native conveyances of all sorts constantly traversing it, made the trunk road an amusing and animated scene ; yet Lilian and her uncle were not sorry when their long and dusty journey came to an end, and they entered at a gallop the well-known

cantonment of Jahmere, with its green and watered gardens, its trim bungalows, its shady roads, its neat church, its racquet-court, and its handsome barracks and mess-houses.

CHAPTER III.

JAHMERE.

“WELCOME to my poor quarters!” cried Colonel Scott, as he handed his niece out of her gharry into the broad verandah which shaded the approach to the inner rooms of the bungalow. “You will find your own apartments through here, Lily, and I have engaged an ayah for you who will, I hope do.” This with a sly twinkle in his eye.

“It seems so like coming home, dear uncle,” said she; “though of course this house is new to me. The guard, too, saluting as we arrive, is another thing that recalls old days very forcibly.”

“Aye, aye, said he, “and you will find much more.”

“Why, Chahni, is that really you?” exclaimed Lilian, as a veiled figure came forward, and after a

profound salaam began kissing her feet. "Only to think of your being here ! Oh, what a kind uncle I have, to bring my old ayah back again just when I wanted her so much ! But, then, I never dreamt of her being at liberty just now."

"I thought you would like to have her," said the Colonel, smiling, "and she was quite ready to come ; so here, you see, she is."

"Missy-baba looks fresh and well after her visit to Belaat!" exclaimed the ayah, gazing affectionately at her young mistress, "and she is quite the mem-sahib now, after only three years too !"

"Three years is a long time, Chahni, especially at my age, but I don't suppose you will find me much changed, though I seem a bit taller than you now," said the girl, comparing her height with the ayah's as she spoke.

By this time the united efforts of Bhagut and Kulloo, and the host of servants at the bungalow had succeeded in transferring Lilian's baggage to the inner apartments, and thither she and Chahni betook themselves for a time. Like the bearer,

Chahni had been in the service of Lilian's mother when she died, and since she had remained constantly with the child, till she had gone to England to finish her education and see something of her relatives there. Her influence over her young charge for good or for ill had been almost as considerable as Bhagut's, and it was but a natural consequence of their constant companionship that the girl's character should have been moulded and formed very much by the ruling and practice of these two servants. Kind and yielding though they were in many ways, there were some points where their teaching and example could not but be prejudicial and baneful ; yet such was the art they practised that her kind uncle and guardian, absorbed in providing for his niece's external welfare and happiness, remained in total ignorance of the deeper springs which had come to move her inner mind and heart. Lilian's visit to Europe might have been expected to modify some of the superstitions she had imbibed thus early in her childhood, but either they had unwittingly laid too firm

a hold on her imagination, or had assimilated too perfectly with the native blood that coursed through her veins, to be affected by her brief sojourn amid the happier influences of English life; for certain it is that this beautiful girl, the centre of attraction wherever she moved, remained practically in the border-land which separates the religion she professed from the ancient faith of her mother, with all its myths and legends, its mysterious rites and fearful idolatries. Now that she was back in the sunny land of her birth and once more under the influences that had formerly affected her, it was only natural she should revert to her ancient ways, and relapse in some degree under the spell of what had so attracted her during her early years.

The afternoon was drawing on when Colonel Scott called to his niece from the verandah, for she was busy in her room unpacking and arranging her many possessions.

"Here come the native officers, Lily, to make their salaams: I hope you will appear just to

greet them for a moment, or they will be disappointed."

A singular group of well-dressed natives approached as he spoke. First came the Russaldar, Ram Dyall, a most striking figure, tall and handsome, his long, dark-blue coat worked over with gold braid and lace, his head covered by a rich crimson pugaree, his breast adorned with war medals and Orders conferred for conspicuous bravery in the field. Next in order was the old Seikh, Heera Singh, chiefly remarkable for his long white beard, his high cheek-bones and restless eyes ; but a man well able to hold his own where knocks were hardest and a cool head indispensable. Then followed the young and good-looking Mahomedan, Secunder Khan, a splendid rider, and so good at neza-bazi that he seldom missed the tent peg, generally carrying it off in triumph on his spear point ; while to him succeeded a wild and savage Pathān, one Ghoolam Ali Khan, celebrated for his feats with the sword, among which was that of cutting in two a live sheep at a single blow.

These and many more, as they came up, presented the hilts of their swords to their Colonel with every demonstration of respect, expressing in no measured terms their delight at his return, saying repeatedly—

“ We live anew in the light of your countenance, Protector of the poor, father of us all ! ”

“ Your honour’s health is good, I trust ? ” said Ram Dyall, as he took the chair on the Colonel’s right hand, while the others ranged themselves in due order of rank, the officers sitting while those of the lower grade stood round.

“ Excellent, thank you,” replied the Colonel ; “ but I am right glad to be back again amongst you, for the life is freer here than in the city on the Hooghly.”

A murmur of satisfaction greeted this remark.

“ And we hope the Missy-baba has made a good passage over the black water ? ” said the old Seikh. “ She was very brave to go off by herself in that way, and when she was so young too ! ”

“ She had the bearer, Bhagut, with her, you

know, so she was well taken care of," answered the Colonel, smiling.

"And you sahib-logue think nothing of the sea which to us is so terrible," said the handsome Secunder Khan ; "that is a thing I marvel greatly at."

"Staff of the world," put in the Pathān, "if your honour ever goes to your Belaāt, I pray you let me accompany you there."

"Very well, Ghoolam Ali, I will not forget ; but here comes the Missy-baba to speak to you herself."

All rose as Lilian came amongst them, and respectfully submitted their swords' hilts for her to touch.

"Your devoted slaves salute you," cried Ram Dyall, gallantly. "There is, indeed, no necessity to ask how you have borne the voyage."

"No," said she, laughing, "none at all ; but I fear poor Bhagut may not have enjoyed it so much !"

"My brother is thin," replied the Russaldar, gravely ; "but with the good air and water of

Jahmere, and by your favour, he will soon grow stout again."

"Ravisher of hearts!" exclaimed Ghoolam Ali, "we have been told the ice and snow in your Belaat have been nearly equal to those in Cābul. Is that so?"

"I daresay it is," answered she, "for we had a foot of snow last winter upon the ground, and the ice on the river bore a coach and four horses."

"Wah! wah!" echoed they all; "what terrible cold that must be!"

"It is very pleasant, and healthy too, and braces one up for the hot weather," said Lilian, much amused at their unaffected horror of the rigours of winter.

"Incomparable lady," ventured the Seikh, "can you tell me about the quality of the opium in the far-distant Belaat, and whether it is to be preferred to that of Behar?"

This question provoked a general smile, but Lilian was equal to the occasion.

"I am not such a judge as you, Heera Singh,"

for he was a well-known opium eater ; “ but there is, I was told, a superior kind carried to England from Roum, and, besides that from Turkey, one hears of the Smyrna opium, which is highly thought of.”

How wonderful is her knowledge !” remarked Secunder Khan to the Colonel, who seemed amused at his niece’s readiness ; “ she is indeed the Sun of women !”

“ It grows late,” said Ram Dyall, looking towards the west, “ and your honour’s dinner-hour approaches. Have your humble servants leave to depart ?”

“ Yes, you have my permission to go,” replied the Colonel ; and, rising, they all made their respectful salutations, renewing, at the same time, their professions of friendship and fidelity.

Yet, even then, one at least among them had within him a heart black with treachery.

Warm and frequent were the greetings that met Colonel Scott and his niece next evening as they

drove up to the band-stand in the centre of the public garden, and many the enquiries of Lilian as to her voyage and experiences.

"We are very glad to see you, Miss Langford," said Major Moody, of the Red Dirks, after the first handshakings were over ; "for we want something new to enliven us and shake us up."

"Are things so dull then, at Jahmere," laughed Lilian, "that you expect assistance from me?"

"Certainly ; we have been looking forward to your coming with eagerness, and now shall be able to start our regular season."

"Well, Major Moody," rejoined she, "I think we shall have capital assistance when Captain Slingsby arrives ; and then there is my cousin, Walter Spencer, a very good help at most things, and a first-rate rider and cricketer."

"Ah, I am delighted to hear that," said he, with considerable interest, "for you know he is coming to join us. Your cousin, Miss Langford, is he?"

"Well, yes, he is my second cousin, and I have seen a great deal of him while at home."

"Indeed! I should not have thought—I had no idea——"

"That I had relations in England?" cried Lilian, her colour rising. "Oh, dear, yes; on my father's side, you know, there are several."

"I see," he replied, eyeing her closely; "I can understand now."

It was evident that Lilian was becoming more and more uncomfortable under his gaze, for she turned quickly to her uncle, who was speaking to Mrs. Davis in the next carriage, and asked if he knew who the particularly handsome man was that had just cantered past in civilian's dress.

"Indeed, I do not, Lily, but possibly Mrs. Davis can inform us, though she, too, is only just back at Jahmere."

"I can't say I know him," responded the lady appealed to, "but I can tell you something about him. His name is Denis Delmar, and he is at the Calcutta bar, where I understand he is just commencing practice. So much I heard down there."

"What is his object, then," asked the Colonel, "in being at Jahmere?"

"Well," continued Mrs. Davis, "they say that at Oxford, where he took a wonderful degree in law, he particularly qualified himself to advise on property, and the succession to it. Now you know the Begum of Lodhpore died last year, leaving enormous estates and something like fifty lakhs of rupees."

"Yes, I have of course heard of that," said the Colonel, becoming interested; "and have, in fact, been to her successor's shooting-box only a few miles off, and had capital sport there."

"Mr. Delmar was offered a good fee by the Begum's heir to take up his defence against some other claimant, and he thought the case so important as to require his presence on the spot; so here he is."

"Then he will be staying some time, no doubt, in the neighbourhood?" asked Lilian.

"Probably. The case is to be argued in the High Court before long, and he will remain for that, of course."

indeed? / At this moment the subject of their conversation rode slowly past, and Colonel Scott and his niece had a full view of the young barrister, whose dark complexion and hair gave to his well-cut features an older look than perhaps they deserved.

"He may be seven or eight and twenty," remarked the Colonel, presently; "not more, I should say."

"Not so much, uncle, in my opinion," said Lilian, quietly.

"I hear there is no Mrs. Delmar, and his idea is to work hard for a few years and then retire to England with a fortune," said Mrs. Davis.

"That is the dream of so many who come out here," laughed the Colonel. "I believe it was mine once, but I have outlived it this many a day."

"And would not go even if you could now, uncle, dear?" asked his niece.

"I'm really not sure, Lily; but at any rate I have no choice in the matter, for my debt to the bank does not grow less, I can tell you."

"Now, is that partly my fault, I wonder?" inquired Lilian, as, wishing Mrs. Davis good evening, they drove on.

"No, no, my dear child. Your fault, indeed! What could put such an idea into your head?" asked he, perceiving he had gone too far.

"You see," she answered, "I know so little of these things, and yet there have been all the expenses on my account in England during these three years. Oh, uncle, I have never thanked you half enough for all you have done for me!"

"Nonsense, nonsense, dear!" exclaimed he, hastily. And then, changing the subject completely, "That Mr. Delmar, Lily; what do you think of him from the glimpse we had just now?"

"Well," said she, "I really don't know exactly; but when he passed us the second time I felt almost startled."

"Why was that, I wonder?" asked the Colonel.
"Had you seen him before?"

"Oh, dear no; never before," answered she, with certainty; "and yet there was something about

him—but it's too absurd an idea—and one often fancies one sees likenesses between the most impossible people, you know."

"That is true, Lily ; but I should like to hear who it is that you have in your mind as being like this Delmar."

"No, uncle dear, it's so ridiculous I really can't tell you—at present, at all events," said she, laughing. "Besides, you could not understand it—yet."

"Very well, very well, my child. I dare say we shall see something more of this young barrister, and then I may be able to draw my own conclusions," replied the Colonel, as they turned into the drive under the long avenue of acacias that led up to the door.

CHAPTER IV.

A POLO MATCH.

"I SAY, Walter," cried Edward Slingsby one morning after parade, as he rode up to the former's bungalow in the lines of the Red Dirks, "I want to settle about this polo match for next week. Will you be ready with your team on Thursday?"

"Certainly, old fellow," answered Spencer, coming out and speaking with interest. "We shall have had enough practice by that time, and I will at once warn Davis and the other two of the arrangement."

"Then we'll say Thursday at four o'clock; and may God defend the right!" said Slingsby smiling.

It was more than a month since these two had arrived at Jahmere, and the usual cold weather

parades had largely engrossed their time. Now, however, there being a slight break, Lilian Langford, in her anxiety to see a really good contest, had offered a silver cup as a prize to the best team, and Slingsby and Edward Spencer had arranged to captain the strongest players they could find, the former choosing the young Mahomedan, Secunder Khan, and two other native officers of his own Lancers, while Spencer selected young Frank Davis and a couple of friends from the Red Dirks.

Though long well known, especially amongst the hill countries bordering India, polo had only quite lately come to be practised by the English there, and it was not surprising that, on the afternoon of the great contest, the whole of Jahmere was assembled on the ground, anxious to watch the game. As the two teams, headed by their leaders, took up their stations, there was a buzz of excitement, and glasses were in great request to watch the coming struggle.

“Now we owe this interesting match, the first of

the kind ever played at Jahmere, to you, Miss Langford," said Major Moody, as he rode up to where Lilian sat with her uncle; "and I wonder who is to win?"

"Really," laughed Lilian, "I cannot tell, the uncertainties of the game are so great."

"Well, but I venture to ask which you *wish* to see victorious? I think I can guess, though," added he, looking at her attentively.

"Why you should speak so I do not know, Major Moody," said Lilian, beginning to feel as uncomfortable as she had done before when he had questioned her. "All I care for is that the best side should win."

"Is that really *all*?" he asked incredulously.

But his question remained unanswered, for play had begun in earnest, and the game was already as lively as the most exacting could require. At first the dash of the Slingsby side was not to be resisted, and Secunder Khan, by most admirable and gallant forward play, secured a goal; but then the Red Dirks pulled themselves together,

So obvious & could be seen

and, fighting in the most determined manner, forced their adversaries back, their leader Walter Spencer just getting the ball home.

"That was well done of the boy!" cried the Major, with animation. "He really will be a fine player with a little more practice, Miss Langford."

Lilian's cheeks were burning, and her delight at this fine rally was apparent.

"They all seem to me to play well, but Walter and that young native officer, whose face I know, are the hardest riders," she said.

At this moment, either by accident or design, Secunder Khan came by at a canter, bowing slightly as he passed.

"He certainly is determined you shall not forget him," muttered the Major. "I don't much like that look of his; an insolent fellow, I should say."

"Oh, no," said she, "you are mistaken there; he is one of my uncle's greatest favourites."

There now ensued some desperate rallies, during which the defensive tactics of Slingsby proved

admirable, though eventually the Red Dirks seemed on the point of scoring, for Spencer with a brilliant run was carrying all before him, when Secunder Khan, leading a furious onslaught at top speed, cannoned against him with great force. Both were dismounted in a moment, but, while the native rose appearing none the worse, the young Red Dirk lay motionless on the plain, his face turned up unconsciously to the sky.

“Ah—h—h—!” shrieked a voice in agony—a voice that was heard to the furthest limit of the ground ; and as Slingsby, who had instantly flung himself off his pony and come to his friend’s assistance, was raising him up, he encountered the scared look in Lilian Langford’s eyes, for, regardless of appearances, she had run to the spot, carried away by intense anxiety for her cousin’s safety.

“Is he dead?” she asked, despair painted in her face. “Is he dead, Captain Slingsby?”

“No, no, Miss Langford ; I trust not. But here comes Dalrymple ; make way for him.”

The surgeon made a hasty examination, and then the hospital dooly carried off the young fellow to his quarters, Slingsby and Dalrymple walking on either side. Of course all play was over for the day, and the assemblage slowly dispersed.

“My poor Lily!” exclaimed the Colonel, as he drove his niece off the ground, “you must be more careful in future, for, do you know, that shriek of yours still rings in my ears! Accidents will happen at this game, and I trust young Spencer is not so very badly injured after all.”

“Oh, uncle, I don’t know what to do. It was I who brought all this about by my insane wish to see the game well played, and here is poor Walter killed perhaps in consequence! If I had only known—if I had only thought——”

She stopped, for at this moment they were met by Delmar, who came riding up from the other direction.

“I am very glad to say, Miss Langford,” cried he, “that Spencer shows signs of coming round ;

he has opened his eyes and recognised Slingsby, and there is great hope for him."

"Oh, thank you so much, Mr. Delmar," said Lilian, smiling very graciously on him; "you have taken a terrible load off my mind by your news."

"I felt sure it would please you," he said, "and am very glad to be the bearer of it. Now, good afternoon."

And he was off ere more could be said.

"He is a nice fellow, Lily, so far as I see," exclaimed the Colonel.

Lilian shook her head.

"It seems ungracious, but I can't agree with you, uncle; it's hard to say why."

The Colonel appeared astonished, and laughed as he replied—

"Well, my child, there's something in his look that reminds me of—of a person that I know you think a good fellow, to say the least of it."

It was Lilian's turn to be surprised, but she hardly seemed so as she answered him.

"Ah, at last you know what I meant weeks ago when we spoke of this, and yet there is no comparison between the two men—at least in my opinion."

"You are hardly a fair judge in the matter, dear Lily," said the Colonel, affectionately, "for there can be no doubt, after what has happened to-day, of your feelings towards young Spencer."

"Dearest uncle," murmured she, "I have come to know this afternoon, in a moment as it were, what Walter Spencer is to me. Oh, if he dies, what will become of me?"

"Well, well, Lily, there is no need to speak so. We must hope for the best, my child," he said, in a reassuring tone.

"Meantime," continued Lilian, "you will keep my secret faithfully, will you not?"

"Of course I shall, dear child. Not a soul shall know it so far as I am concerned."

And so their talk ended for the time, for standing in the verandah of the bungalow they found the native officer, Secunder Khan, anxiously wait-

ing for them, and no sooner had they descended than he came forward beseeching their pardon for the sad catastrophe that had occurred.

"Not at all," cried the Colonel, "you were not to blame in the least, and there is no pardon required, Secunder Khan."

"Will the Missy-sahib say the same?" murmured the young fellow turning his handsome eyes on Lilian. "Will she forgive her humble slave for his fault?"

"Of course I know it was a pure accident," answered she, simply. "But why should you ask my forgiveness after receiving my uncle's?"

"Because—because—" stammered he, "there is friendship between the Missy-sahib and the young Captain Spencer."

As he spoke, the words of Major Moody came back into Lilian's mind, and she fancied, in spite of the respectful, almost cringing attitude of the native officer, that a tinge of sarcasm pervaded his manner.

"Yes, we are friends," said she proudly, as she

passed on into the bungalow ; “and he is, you know, my cousin.”

The sun had long since set on that eventful day, and Edward Slingsby was sitting by the bedside of his friend Spencer, watching him as he slept. The room was dark, save that the rays of a full moon fell slanting into the verandah, lighting up one corner of it, and revealing outside the beds and paths of the garden in all their straight and formal regularity. At a short distance beyond the usual murmur of the bazaar could be heard, its monotonous tones every now and then interrupted by the loud beating of a tum-tum, or the hideous screeching of a pack of jackals quarrelling over their prey. A faint odour of burning fuel from many cooking fires mingling with the sickly scent of the numerous acacia trees and flowering shrubs around, made the air feel heavy and oppressive, and it was with some difficulty that the watcher, fatigued as he was, kept himself awake. He had just reapplied the bag of ice to the sleeper's forehead, and taken his seat for

another period of quiet observation, when he became aware that a palki, which was being borne rapidly past the bungalow, had stopped at the corner, and that a man who had run up from it, as if with a message, was at that moment speaking to Spencer's bearer.

"My mistress is ~~dying to know~~ how the sahib is now," Slingsby heard him say.

"Is that she in the palki?" asked the man addressed.

"Yes, of course, but she is not stopping here—only passing by—so I have run in to ask."

"Well, the sahib is better, and is now sleeping. The order is for us all to be very quiet."

"Then there is good hope that he will not die?" said the first man, whom Slingsby had recognised by his voice to be no other than the bearer Bhagut. "Ah, she will be glad to hear that."

"It is too late for dinner; where is your mem going to now?" enquired the other.

"Oh, she has some distance to travel; to the other side of the city in fact," was the reply.

"Now, what can be the reason of that? Tell me, my brother, for I am dying to hear."

"You know the Brahmin of the temple by the river, my friend?" whispered Bhagut, so low that Slingsby could scarcely catch his words; "him she sees occasionally, and the old man is gaining an influence over her which may be of benefit hereafter—who knows?"

There was a pause; then the other's voice spoke.

"He is a very holy man, but I understand nothing of your meaning—if your words have a meaning, that is."

"Perhaps not, brother," returned Bhagut, shortly, and I have no time now to explain; so good-night, for I dare not stay."

He returned quickly to the palki, but ere he reached it Slingsby had seen by the bright moonlight the outline of the face of Lilian Langford very distinctly revealed, and could even catch a word or two of her eager enquiries after the young fellow whose life and safety were so dear to her.

Satisfied, apparently, with the intelligence she received, she lay back and closed the door, and next moment was being carried in the direction of the city, which lay some distance off.

CHAPTER V.

TEN SECONDS WITH A TIGER.

THE weather had begun to grow warm, and Walter Spencer had quite got over the effects of his fall when news was brought to Jahmere of the depredations committed by a man-eating tiger in the neighbourhood of Hingoli, a village between fifteen and twenty miles distant; and, as this was an opportunity not to be missed, a party was organised in the course of a few hours by Colonel Scott, who determined, in spite of their unhealthiness, that the jungles of Hingoli should become his hunting-ground.

“I have got Mrs. Davis to promise to be of our party,” said he one day to Lilian, “so, my dear, you can come with us on this trip after all, instead

of going off at once to the hills, as I had intended."

"Oh, uncle, how good of you!" cried she, "and how kind of Mrs. Davis."

"Well, I expect you to obey orders in all respects, and to make yourself both useful and agreeable," he said, smiling.

"I will try," laughed she, "and I think we are sure to have a thoroughly enjoyable time."

"I hope so, and I don't see why we should not have good sport too, for I know Slingsby is very keen and a capital shot, while Moody is of course a steady old shikāri. About your cousin Walter, Lily," continued the Colonel, with a sly look at his niece, "it is impossible to say anything, while Delmar also is an uncertain quantity."

"Uncle, dear, have you asked Mr. Delmar? I thought he was going back to Calcutta soon," said Lilian, in a tone of disappointment.

"He almost gave himself an invitation, my child, by expressing his intense desire to be in at the death of this man-eater that we hope to secure."

Lilian shrugged her shoulders.

“And Major Moody, too ; somehow I cannot understand your liking for him,” she said.

“Oh, Moody is such a very old friend, and such a thorough sportsman. Besides, you know he is a great man among the Red Dirks, and has taken up young Spencer.”

These last words were a master-stroke on the part of the Colonel, and Lilian, having no further criticism to offer, proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for the party, so far as the cuisine, a department always under her particular charge, was concerned. For the transport and commissariat her uncle was answerable, and the train of elephants and baggage-ponies which wended its way towards Hingoli on the morning of their departure showed the excellent forethought that had led him to provide for every possible want.

“What a charming spot !” cried Mrs. Davis, as she alighted from her howdah in the centre of the little camp at Hingoli. “Really, Colonel Scott, your people have a true eye for the picturesque,

since they have fixed on so lovely a site for the tents."

"We have been here before, you know," replied he, "so I was able to give my native officer a tolerably distinct idea of my wishes."

"I should think there may be fishing in the nullah," said Lilian, as she rode to the bank and looked into the clear pool below. "Do you know, Captain Slingsby, anything of its capabilities?"

"Well, no, Miss Langford, not much ; but Moody can tell you all about it, for he is a great fisherman, as you may have heard," replied he.

Lilian looked at the Major, who had dismounted and followed them, for a confirmation of this statement.

"Yes," he said, "I have always loved the sport, and many a good mahseer have I captured in that stream. You must get to know where they lie, and then with your hook smeared with the right scent you cannot fail to be successful."

"But do you mean," asked Lilian, "that fish possess the sense of smell?"

"Certainly," he replied, "and I think this very thing is a sure proof of it. I shall be delighted to initiate you in the mysteries of the sport, Miss Langford—if you will allow me, that is."

"Oh, thank you," she said, turning round her horse's head, "I do not much think I shall care about it. And, besides——"

"Breakfast!" shouted the Colonel from the shamiana under which he was seated. "Surely you are ready for it after our long ride!"

It was Walter Spencer who helped Lilian down and sat next her at the table, and, though Moody's bearing was as calm and undisturbed as usual, it was apparent, at any rate to Slingsby, that he was not altogether at ease. Yet the party was a merry one, no discordant element being apparent on the surface.

The camp made quite a pretty object on the level sward just above the stream, the white tents relieved by the background of dark mangoes, amongst which the flocks of bright green parrots fluttered and shrieked, and the little black and

yellow striped squirrels, disturbed in their accustomed haunts, ran about here and there looking very roguish and chasing each other from tree to tree, while now and again the grinning face of some old lungoor showed itself between the branches, as the hideous monkey swung from bough to bough by the aid of its powerful tail. At one side, under a shady peepul tree, was established the kitchen, and here it was that during the afternoon Lilian passed some time in preparing the particular curry that her uncle said she alone possessed the secret of, and which he had named "The Langford" in her honour ; moreover, knowing well what often went on in the establishments of Anglo-Indians, she was not satisfied to leave the cooking arrangements in the hands of even the highly-competent man employed by Colonel Scott without an occasional close inspection. In the rear, and at some distance, was picketed the long line of horses and elephants, the former secured by their head and heel ropes, the latter generally by one foot only, while in close proximity to the

animals were their attendants, who as a rule slept on the ground beside them. It was pretty to see the horses of an evening greedily chewing the sweet carrots that the syces gave them, or the elephants consuming with satisfaction the huge ¹ chuppaties or the succulent lengths of sugar-cane purveyed to them by their mahouts, all the while flapping their huge ears to and fro to keep off the troublesome flies.

"I find," said the Colonel during dinner, "the tiger killed a villager last night within four miles of where we are sitting, and I propose that we should beat the jungle where he has been marked down to-morrow morning."

"Very good, sir, remarked Moody; "but do they know he has not moved during to-day?"

"Well, Secunder Khan has had a couple of men watching, and the head shikari assures me we have a very good chance of finding him at home."

"May I go, uncle dear?" asked Lilian eagerly. I should so like to see this tiger shot, and with you there would be no fear of accident."

"No, no, Lily ; this is too dangerous a beast to run any risk with, and I could not feel comfortable if you were present. Another day perhaps you might venture—we shall see."

"Lily and I must make ourselves happy in camp," said Mrs. Davis, coming to the rescue, for she saw how disappointed the girl was ; "and as the English mail will be here in the afternoon we shall have plenty to think of." *in the jungle?*

Next morning early a long line of strange-looking beings was crouched on the ground at the edge of the mangoe tope, patiently waiting for the order to move. In one respect, and in one only, was there agreement amongst them ; they were destitute of clothing except for the slight garment worn round the loins. Most were armed with long sticks, frequently shod with iron, with which to beat the jungles, for this was the body of beaters on whose exertions the sport of the day in a great measure depended ; but many carried small drums, others bows and arrows and spears, and a few quaint old-fashioned firearms, with belts from which depended

powder-horns of the most original patterns. They had their leader, who duly reported to the native officer Secunder Khan their number, and those on whom he might place the greatest reliance.

And now, the elephants coming round, the party took their seats on them in pairs as previously arranged—Colonel Scott and Secunder Khan, Slingsby and Delmar, Moody and Walter Spencer; and an hour later, on reaching the jungle the Colonel, assuming the centre of the line, directed the advance, which was conducted with steadiness and method. On the further side of the densest strip of the jungle, at a distance of a quarter of a mile perhaps, was a large jheel frequented by the animals which came down there by night for water, and it was not till the beat approached this that anything more important than pig or hog-deer was disturbed. Suddenly the shout arose, “Bagh! bagh!” from the beaters on the right, and at that instant a waving of the long grass in front of Moody’s elephant proved that some large animal was stealing away.

Spencer fired.

"Unless you had a better view than I you did wrong, young man," said Moody quietly to his companion. "Look what a rumpus there is all along the line there!"

"I didn't like to lose the chance; perhaps I wounded him, too," cried Spencer, apologetically.

The shouts and drumming and excitement were now so general that no other sounds could be heard; but, though the tiger was seen, as they declared, by two or three of the beaters, he effected his escape successfully, and not all the strenuous efforts of the party could induce him again to show himself. There being, indeed, little doubt that he had made his way rapidly into some adjacent and extensive cover where it was hopeless at this moment to follow him, the Colonel, after consulting Moody, gave the word to return to the camp, and presently the long train was wending its way back under the scorching and pitiless sun.

The English mail came in that afternoon, as was expected, and for a time everyone was absorbed in

their own correspondence. Whether it was that Lilian was less interested in the event than the rest, or that her epistle from Edith Spencer was soon read through, certain it is that, as she sat quietly while the others were conning over their letters, she was much surprised to see how deeply moved Delmar appeared to be by his intelligence. All colour left his face, the expression of which showed how deeply he was pained, and, crushing the ill-starred sheet in his hand, he rose for a moment, and then quickly fell back into his chair.

‘You are not well, Mr. Delmar!’ Lilian exclaimed, her kindlier feelings at once aroused; “let me get you a glass of sherry before you move.”

“No, no, you are too kind, Miss Langford,” he said, in a low tone; “I shall be all right in a minute or two.”

“Why, what is it, Delmar?” cried the Colonel. “No bad news from home, I hope?”

The question was an unfortunate one, and it was

only after drinking the wine, most opportunely presented him by Lilian, that he could answer it.

"Well," he said, with an effort, "that is just it; I have heard something dreadfully sad, of a domestic character—so sad that I can hardly believe it to be true."

There was a general expression of sympathy from those around.

"Thank you," he murmured, "thank you all sincerely. I must consider matters, and at any rate must return to Jahmere to-morrow."

Then, without giving any more definite hint of the nature of his trouble, he retired to his tent, not to reappear till dinner-time.

"The Langford" curry and the other courses had been duly discussed, and the Colonel was inhaling the cool fumes of his hookah whilst the other gentlemen were enjoying their less orthodox cheroots and pipes, when Slingsby started the question of the tiger, by asking what was to be the plan of action next.

"Naturally, I have considered that," said the

Colonel, "and have arranged for a bullock to be tethered in the thick cover near the jheel."

"To-night, sir?" asked Major Moody.

"Yes, we shall have the shikari's report in the morning, you know."

The Major considered a few seconds.

"Now, I have something to propose, Colonel," he said, "that I hope you'll agree to. This is a chance I've often wished for, and I hope you won't consider me selfish in what I'm going to ask."

"What is it?" inquired the Colonel, wondering.

"That I take the place of the bullock to-night, and see what account it may be possible to give of his majesty the tiger."

There was a chorus of dissent as Moody quietly said these words, and from the ladies especially came exclamations about the rashness and folly of such a course.

"I don't see that at all," rejoined he, calmly knocking the ash off his cheroot. "There is a very fair light, everything will be quiet, and one's

aim consequently undisturbed: it is exactly the opportunity that is so enticing."

The Colonel smiled to himself, and smoked on.

"The only thing I feel is," continued the Major, "that perhaps I am in a manner spoiling sport; but, if anyone else would prefer to try conclusions with the brute, I will give way at once."

A general laugh greeted this offer, and as it remained unaccepted, Moody, looking at the Colonel, said he would be ready in five minutes for the jungle.

"Well, you have my best wishes," said the latter, heartily, as the Major reappeared, dressed in his shooting costume. "But what have you there," pointing to what he carried in one hand, "that looks so like a bell?"

"It *is* a bell—one of those worn by the bullocks in these parts," replied Moody; "and my idea is to sound it occasionally, so as to let the beast know whereabouts his prey is to be found."

"A capital idea, truly!" laughed the Colonel,

"but you must be careful not to nap during your vigil, or it might go hard with you."

"You may trust me for that, I think," rejoined Moody, gravely. "Now, good-night, for I must be off, and I see everything is ready for action."

So saying, he waved his adieux to the party, and next moment was gone.

The shikari was not a little surprised, on Moody's arrival at the spot, to be ordered to remove the bullock, as he was going to remain in its place.

"Is my master mad!" he cried, "and does he value his life as nothing, that he should ask me to do this?"

"I have the Colonel-sahib's permission, and that is enough for you," replied the Major quietly, "so the sooner you release the animal the better."

"And am I to bear you company, sahib, in this adventure?" asked the man, evidently in some perturbation.

"No, no, my friend," was the reply; "I don't want you or any man to be near. This is my

affair entirely, and no one else is to be involved in it."

"Incomparable lord!" returned the fellow, deeply struck by the calm determination of the Major, yet evidently relieved by this announcement; "your slave has but one duty to perform, but it is truly a sad one."

With these words he removed the fastenings by which the bullock had been bound, the animal's joy at being released from his thralldom manifesting how strong a suspicion he must have entertained of the object of his detention.

It was, indeed, a wild and gloomy spot, the tall jungle-grass hiding any objects more than a few yards distant, the ground below dry and parched, the moon overhead, though near the full, frequently obscured by light clouds, the appearance of which caused some anxiety to the Major as he now noticed them for the first time. As the shikari, with a low salaam, departed in silence, leaving him alone, he slung over his shoulder the bullock-bell he had brought, and then placing his rifles

ready to his hand waited calmly for what might happen.

Why had he undertaken this needless task? What was really at the bottom of this mad adventure that he professed he had long had in his mind? He, cautious and self-possessed as he was, knew it to be nothing but the desire to stir the admiration, perhaps gain the love, of Lilian Langford; and this he was forced to confess to himself—he a man of well-nigh forty years—as he commenced his solitary vigil that night. He had known something years ago of Lilian's parents; he remembered the intense admiration he had felt as a boy for her father, and when looking at the girl now the noble face and fine expression of her mother came vividly back to him. As a matter of course, he was aware of the mixture of blood that ran in her veins, but he knew also that not the purest and bluest Norman strain could compare for antiquity with that of the high-caste Rajpoots from whom she was descended through her mother—those heroes whose noble deeds were for

ever enshrined in the history of their romantic country. Yes ; James Moody acknowledged that by this half-Rajpoot girl he, who was almost a veteran, had as if by magic been captivated ; that for her dear sake and to move her heart he would venture more, infinitely more, than was involved in his present adventure, desperate as that might seem.

Close beside where he stood the decaying trunk of a stately teak-tree spread abroad its bare arms to the sky, as if waving them silently to the moon above ; in the distance the faint yelp of a jackal could now and then be heard, the only sound, save the occasional tinkle of the bell he controlled, that broke the silence of the night, for no air was moving to disturb the perfect repose of all around. Yet, as Moody looked upwards, he became aware that a huge vulture had settled on a branch over his head, poised there a minute as it seemed for some purpose of its own, then with a circling movement flying high above him, and becoming lost as mysteriously as it had appeared. Perhaps

the unclean bird had been attracted by the bell ; if so, no doubt it met with disappointment, which it perhaps communicated to others of its tribe, waiting in the upper air to descend upon their prey. At any rate the watcher remained undisturbed for a long and irksome period—so long that weariness was fast overcoming him, and he began to despair of success. The clouds that for a time had obscured the moon had all cleared away, and her silvery light shone full upon the gaunt branches above and the tangled jungle-grass below.

What was that that broke the stillness close to Moody's ear ?

Then again, a decided crackle within a few yards of his left hand !

In an instant he had his rifle ready, and was peering into what looked like an impenetrable mixture of bushes and coarse grass.

Suddenly a long, low growl struck his ear, and by keeping his eyes steadily on the suspected place he could discern a pair of greenish-yellow

lights directed on him as if from the ground, while a subdued crackling could be heard proceeding from the same spot.

Then Moody knew himself to be face to face with the man-eater—knew he was looking straight into those cruel eyes, and that the pendulum-like rattling of the tail amongst the bushes surely heralded the fatal spring that would bring death to him the next instant. As he gazed intently, hoping to get a better and more distinct view of his foe, he could see the huge lips retracting convulsively, revealing the white fangs behind; yet the brute seemed puzzled and baffled, and doubtless the sight before him was far different from the helpless bullock he had expected to find, while the cold glint that came from Moody's rifle barrel, as he slowly raised it to his shoulder, acted still further as a check upon his advance.

It was by this movement that, involuntarily on Moody's part, the bell gave a tinkle that resolved all the tiger's doubts, for with a deafening and hideous roar he sprang high into the air, and fell

with open mouth and paws extended to their utmost, full upon his unprotected assailant. There was a flash in the air, a shivering among the jungle-grass and bushes, a deep groan as of some creature's death agony ; then silence, and, as the clouds again began to obscure the moon, a darker shadow on the earth than had yet fallen over it.

Why was it that the first sound to break the stillness of this scene was the flap-flap of the wings of the great unclean bird that had so lately visited it? Why did the air above suddenly become alive with other creatures of the same ill-omened aspect, which, after perching for a moment on the old tree, descended one by one cautiously to gloat over the prey to which an unerring instinct had conducted them?

CHAPTER VI.

A PROPOSAL.

BUT the foul-winged crew that flopped and fluttered and fought over what lay helpless at its feet was not to have a time of uninterrupted enjoyment of its carrion, for soon the strange laugh of the hideous hyæna could be heard, and the shrill shrieks of the assembling jackals echoed far and wide through the still night air. It was marvellous, the change from its previous solitude that had come over that secluded spot within so short a space. Marvellous, too, was what next took place, for a sudden movement among the birds and beasts that clustered closest round the prey proved the advent of some superior power ; and when, glancing carefully to right and left, the face of the

native shikari was seen, and a moment later his strangely-accoutred figure revealed itself at the foot of the withered teak-tree, a general stampede took place, though many of the animals remained close by, unwilling to relinquish their hopes of a meal.

Bang ! bang !

The shikari, far too experienced to leave any doubt as to the tiger's death, fired point blank into him as he lay there, thus making full assurance of his harmlessness. He might have spared himself the trouble, for the shell from Moody's rifle had blown his huge head to pieces, having been aimed at him unerringly as he rose in his final leap to strike down his prey.

By this time three or four others had gathered round, and were examining Moody, who was lying face downwards with the tiger's fore-paw as if it had just released hold of his shoulder, which had evidently been terribly mauled. Even as they disengaged him from the embrace of the dead monster, and raised him in their arms, a sigh

escaped him, and presently he opened his eyes, looking wonderingly at them.

"My rifle," he murmured in a low tone, instinctively reaching out for his weapon with the unwounded arm.

"Major-sahib, you have killed the tiger," cried the shikari with delight, "and we shall soon get you back to the camp."

He remembered at once all the circumstances, for he looked round, and seeing the animal close by, muttered—

"Yes, it was a near thing, a very near thing. But this is the right one, the man-eater?"

"Oh yes, Friend of the poor, there is no mistake about that. His face has been blown away by your admirable shell, but the marks on his skin are well known to your slaves. Is it not so?" he asked, turning to the others, who had been examining the beast carefully.

"Without doubt it is," they eagerly agreed. "Wah! wah! but the sahib is a mighty shikari, an incomparable hunter."

"His name will never be forgotten in these jungles, will it?" asked the head man.

"Never, never!" replied they in chorus.

"Can you give me water?" cried poor Moody, faintly, "I am dying for want of it, and this shoulder—ah, it aches abominably."

They brought him water to drink, and he revived presently. Then the shikari, who knew something of wounds, having himself been clawed in many an encounter, carefully washed the place, allowing a gentle stream to flow over it, which soothed the aching, and gave much comfort to the sufferer. Meantime a litter had been constructed from branches and grass, on which Moody was carefully laid, and the men set off to carry him to the camp, followed by others staggering along under the weight of the dead tiger, whose appearance in the few villages through which they passed was greeted with "Wah! wahs!" of surprise and delight.

The morning-star was beginning to fade in the brighter light that was dawning, and the air blew

fresh and cool over the plain, as the little procession entered the camp with their living and dead burdens. The Colonel, early as it was, noted their approach as he was dressing, and without a minute's delay was by Moody's side. A few words sufficed to inform him of the state of affairs, and he decided promptly that the wounded man, who declared he was really comfortable and could bear the journey, should that very evening be carried into Jahmere.

"It will be best so," he said, "and of course our party will all return, for we should have no heart to remain out here."

"I think that a pity," said Moody. "I shall be all right soon, and my last wish would be to cut short your pleasure."

"Delmar is to return to-day," rejoined the Colonel, "and I shall be much surprised if the rest do not desire the same thing."

And so it turned out, for with one voice it was declared that till they knew the Major to be safe there could be no enjoyment for them.

During the morning first one and then another visited him, and it may be doubted if he did not consider himself fortunate to be so injured that he could receive Lilian for a few minutes, and have his pillow smoothed by her as he lay helpless in his tent.

"It is a monster, Major Moody!" she said, admiringly, "but, oh, it was wrong of you to run such a terrible risk!"

"Now don't say so, Miss Langford; it will be too bad if you blame me," he replied, looking up at her imploringly.

"I cannot help it," answered she, simply. "Would you not call such conduct madness in another—in my cousin Walter, for instance?"

"Well," regarding her earnestly, "yes, I should in him; but then he is so very inexperienced—such a mere boy."

A smile of amusement crossed Lilian's face.

"He is a capital young fellow, though," continued Moody, "and will make a first-rate shikari in time, because he is so very keen."

She was plainly gratified by this compliment to her cousin.

"Yes," she said, "I know he is as popular among the Red Dirks as he was with everyone at home."

"Miss Langford," said Moody, in a low tone, "I am an old fellow; I can well remember your parents years ago—I can recollect your being born. It is perhaps madness, and yet I am not without hope—not altogether without the persuasion that you have some regard, even some affection for me."

"Of course I have a great regard for you," she murmured, "and—and—and admiration for your courage and daring."

"That is nothing," he went on more rapidly. "May I not hope that some far deeper feeling may be stirred within you, and that you, Lilian Langford, who are, God knows, all in all to me, will consent to give me your affection—your love—yourself?"

He just touched her hand, looking pleadingly up

in her face, whilst she drew back a step in evident astonishment at this revelation.

“Major Moody!” she said, “it is impossible.”

“Stop!” cried he. “Speak not hurriedly, but consider for a moment that to me your answer carries with it the sentence of happiness or of misery for life! Ah, think of that, and be merciful!”

“Would that I had never,” began the girl in a tone of distress; “but that is useless now! I must leave you, Major Moody; I must go.”

“But you will not reject me? you will let me hope?” he murmured, a faint smile coming over his face.

“Oh, no!” she exclaimed; “do not suppose that for a moment! I cannot explain—I dare not.”

“Is it that your heart is not your own, Lilian Langford—that some other has stolen it, that you, so young, have already given away, Heaven knows to whom, that which——”

“Ah, speak not so!” interrupted she. “You are

good and kind, but 'tis impossible for me ; I am bound——”

“ I see,” he answered ; “ I can understand how it is. Fool that I was ! ”

Lilian stood aghast.

“ See—understand ! ” she exclaimed in terror. “ What is it you think you see ? what is it you understand ? ”

“ Nay,” he replied, astonished in his turn at her vehemence ; “ the explanation seems simple, and yet—well, I am not so sure after all.”

He looked searchingly at her ; she quailed before him.

“ Then, perhaps, I was wrong,” he continued ; “ perhaps, after all, there is not the very sufficient reason I had supposed—perhaps even yet—— ”

There he stopped, evidently considering some new idea that had struck him, while Lilian's distress became more apparent every moment.

“ Far be it from me,” he went on sadly, “ to urge you in any way—to treat you, my own darling, whom I love, ah, how dearly, with anything save

the deepest and truest consideration. I see there is something which prevents your speaking out. Well, be it so! I only pray that to you no harm may come, that this secret purpose of yours——”

“Stay!” cried she, burying her face in her hands. “Spare me, ah, spare me! You know not what you imply by saying that; you are in ignorance of—of——”

She paused there; then continued as if to herself—

“’Tis surely so—surely so; yes, I may feel certain of it, quite certain!”

Moody could not but look surprised, yet he spoke still with the restraint that he had striven so carefully to put upon himself.

“I know not—I ask not to know—your meaning,” he said. “Enough for me that, for the present, there is some insuperable obstacle, some bar to my happiness that cannot be removed. Yet circumstances may change, things may happen that we know not of; and if ever, dear Lilian, you require advice or assistance, remember you may

reckon on James Moody for the deepest sympathy and the truest service."

"Thank you, - thank you!" she murmured, deeply affected. "I have been ungrateful, inconsiderate; I know it too well. But, if you only understood my——"

"May I come in?" cried the Colonel, presenting himself at the door of the tent. "Oh, you here, Lily! Well, and how is the wounded man?"

"Better, Colonel," answered Moody, relieving Lilian for a moment. "I have quite forgotten the wound in the interesting talk Miss Langford and I have been having."

Lilian looked thankfully at him, and the Colonel smiled.

"Everything is arranged for our departure this evening," he said, "but I thought I would just look in and tell you so."

"You will have a good rest first, Major Moody," said Lilian, now quite herself again. "And so good-bye for the present."

As she left the tent with the Colonel they encountered the young Mahomedan, Secunder Khan, who appeared suddenly from under the kunaut in a manner that startled Lilian, whose nerves at the moment were highly strung, while even the Colonel was surprised and slightly annoyed.

"Why, where have you sprung from?" asked he, sharply.

"Cherisher of the poor, I have come to inquire after the Major-sahib," was the reply, "and I trust by the favour of God that he is better."

"Yes, yes," said the Colonel, "but he cannot see you of course, so you may return to your tent. He shall know of your kind enquiry for him."

"May your honour live for ever!" replied the man, salaaming respectfully.

And yet the look of his eyes, and the sidelong smile he cast at Lilian, gave her more serious misgiving than she cared to own at the moment, even to herself. Could it be, she wondered, that beneath that suave and pliant manner there lurked

some plot of mischief, some secret design, with which she herself was in a mysterious way connected? The idea seemed too absurd for consideration, and yet Lilian's fancy kept recurring to it again and again in the course of that long afternoon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NAUTCH.

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SOME days had elapsed, and the shadow of events that were ere long to happen had begun to manifest itself to those who, unblinded by a false sense of security, could look beyond the narrow circle in which they moved. Regiment after regiment revolted, station after station was treacherously burned, the English had to fly for their lives, and in many cases were murdered, men, women, and children, as they fled from their blazing bungalows, or made their hurried retreat, often on foot, through the trackless and inhospitable jungles. Here and there a friendly raja protected them, here and there the fort or the strong house of some native chief was opened to them ; but, as time went on

the English

and the authority of the paramount power became more and more shaken, the seeming friend became lukewarm and sometimes thoroughly hostile, and the poor fugitives had again, frequently without resources of any kind, without food or even sufficient clothing, to sally forth and brave the fearful heat and terrible privations of all sorts that beset them, and that, in many instances, made death appear a welcome relief.

The native officers of the regiments at Jahmere had invited all the ladies and gentlemen of the station to a nautch, which was expected to be a great success, for some beautiful Cashmere girls who happened to be passing through had been engaged, while a wonderful singer from Agra had been brought over specially, at considerable expense.

The moving spirit in this entertainment was Secunder Khan, and it was with much pride and satisfaction that, when the principal guests had been ceremoniously welcomed by the body of native officers, with Russaldar Ram Dyall at their

head, the young Mahomedan led Colonel Scott and his niece to the chairs, near the centre, reserved for them under the lofty shamiana.

Before them lay an expanse of carpet, round the edge of which stood a crowd of natives, handsome Brahmins, Mahomedans of the Punjab, sharp-featured Seikhs, whiskered Rajpoots, and light-skinned Mahrattas, most of them soldiers, with here and there an effeminate-looking clerk or Bengali baboo, all waiting patiently for the dancing to begin. On one side were the nautch girls, beautifully dressed and covered with ornaments, noserings and earrings, and oblong plates of gold inserted in their foreheads, necklaces and bracelets and anklets—strung, in fact, from head to foot with every invention that the fertile brains of the native jewellers could produce ; while beside them crouched the low-browed musicians, to whose accompaniment of tum-tum and sitar their dancing was to be performed.

“Now, I have not seen a nautch for years,” cried Lilian, as they took their places, “and I daresay I

shall not care much for it ; it always used to appear so monotonous."

" And so it is—dull and stupid as ever, I should say," whispered Slingsby, who sat next her ; " but of course we must not say so here."

" Oh, no ; I intend to be interested if I can," said Lilian, after a slight pause and in a more discreet tone, " and I only hope we shall not have to sit long exposed to the gaze of all that crowd of people."

Perhaps she had observed without being aware of it some signs on the faces opposite that struck her as not altogether agreeable, and yet that could hardly be, seeing the obsequious politeness of their entertainers, which was even now again being exercised towards a party of officers of the Red Dirks that had just arrived.

But the word was at length given, and the weird and bizarre music commenced, while two of the women, balancing their figures in the manner that is so characteristic and so greatly admired, advanced and retreated, making an occasional rapid

and complete gyration while extending their arms and moving their hands in rhythmic unison with the air that was played, their feet all the time beating the floor with a constant motion of toe or heel, though never wholly leaving it even for an instant.

"It seems to be hard work," remarked Mrs. Davis to the Colonel, "judging by the state of breathlessness to which they are reduced."

"That is true," he said, "and those women have not spared themselves. See how glad they are to rest a bit while the next pair comes forward."

These girls were really handsome, and as in their incessant whirling their splendid muslin-and-gold dresses stood out stiffly and brushed the faces of the front row of natives as they squatted round, there rose a chorus of applause from many throats. These were the houris from Cashmere, and certainly the bright colour that rose in their cheeks, as the measure quickening in pace ended abruptly in a rapid twist worthy of a ballet-dancer, proclaimed their origin to be different

from that of the sallow-skinned races around them.

"What do you think of that, Lily?" asked Spencer, who being new to this dancing, was evidently deeply interested in it.

"Well," replied she, " it is good in its way, and I can well understand the natives applauding it. Those girls put a deal of spirit into it, and the spectators enjoy that intensely ; they like to see those who are hired to dance before them exert themselves, while they sit by at their ease and criticise."

"Now, who is this?" said Spencer, as a short, ill-looking native came forward, very fantastically attired, and having a curiously-formed stringed instrument suspended from his shoulder.

"This is the sweet singer from Agra," answered the Colonel, for Lilian's attention had been suddenly drawn away from the young officer by a strange head and face in the crowd, from which object indeed she seemed unable to divert it. The lips and jaws of this face were ashen pale, the hair

hung over the ears in elf-locks, while on the forehead were painted the sacred marks which distinguish the Brahmins. It was not a prepossessing sight, yet, being a common enough one in India, there seemed no reason for the agitation it produced in Colonel Scott's niece. Moreover, her own devoted servant, Bhagut, sat next this strange-looking creature, and Lilian could see how they exchanged words at short intervals, apparently referring to some subject which deeply interested them both.

Even as she watched, gazing intently at the spot, the hideous visage disappeared as if by magic, and the crowd closed in so as to hear better the song for which they were waiting.

But no song was to be sung that night, for as the first low notes were heard a loud cry startled the whole company—a cry that burst upon their ears like a clap of thunder, producing an excitement and alarm almost indescribable.

“The Time is at hand—the long-looked for Day!
The sacred cakes have been passed round—the

arrow of Death is about to be shot from the bow of Providence! Everything is in readiness! And shall the polluters of the holy places be spared—those who have used the fat of the sacred animal for their vile purposes? The Time is at hand—the long looked-for Day has come!”

In an instant the older officers and those who understood the full meaning of this invocation were on the alert, and swords were quickly loosed in their scabbards, and pistols felt for in their belts by the more wary ones. Yet, strangely enough, those alone who betrayed real agitation and alarm were the native officers of the various regiments, and it certainly seemed as if their feelings were genuine and their conduct above suspicion.

“A pestilent fanatic!” exclaimed Russaldar Ram Dyall, in a loud tone. “Arrest him there, Secunder Khan, and he shall soon have his deserts!”

“I cannot see him, Russaldar-sahib. There was a man by that tree a moment ago, but he is gone into the darkness, where we can never find him.”

“Can you describe him? What was he like? Instantly order out half a troop to search well the plain there. He may be hiding close by.”

It was indeed a wild-goose chase, for the moon not having risen the only light was that of the torches blazing round the shamiana ; outside that was but the utter and impenetrable darkness of the night.

Whether or not Secunder Khan had really seen the unwelcome disturber of the entertainment may be doubted, but there was no question that one person sitting there among the upper seats knew him only too well, and had recognised his voice as that of a friend whom she was in the habit of meeting and consulting, the sacred Brahmin of the temple to which she paid frequent visits. This person was Lilian Langford.

It was evident to her uncle, and to Spencer and others near, how intense was her agitation, but they little knew the real state of the case, and attributed the excitement which overcame her to the fear that might naturally be raised by the wild

invocation they had all just heard. At the first words Lilian had risen from her chair, striving to pierce the darkness and to trace where the well-known visage of the holy man had escaped to; but, as his terrible words rose upon the air, and she, though only darkly and imperfectly, took in something of their significance, a number of contending emotions overcame her, and she fell back, fainting in her seat.

There was indescribable confusion on every hand, and the Colonel and Mrs. Davis were not sorry when Bhagut, who, from his place on the other side, had witnessed what had occurred, came round to render his mistress all necessary help.

"Where am I?" cried Lilian presently, opening her eyes and looking up.

"All right, my child," said the Colonel, soothingly; "here is Mrs. Davis close by you, and Bhagut has most opportunely come."

"Bhagut!" exclaimed the girl; "Bhagut!—and they were sitting close to each other. Where, then, has——"

"There, Missy-baba, there," interrupted the bearer, "the palki is coming for you, and you will soon be at home again."

She looked at him in astonishment.

"But you must know, Bhagut—you must have seen——"

"Nothing," answered the man, stolidly, "I heard what all heard, but I saw—nothing."

"Then I must have been dreaming," she said, wearily. "Dreaming! no never! I know the face too well! It was not dreaming—it was reality!"

"What does she mean?" asked the Colonel, looking at Bhagut, and half-suspecting his niece's mind was unhinged. "Is there any reason for this?"

"Reason, sahib! How can there be any reason for it?" replied he. "She is frightened, that is all."

At this moment the palki arrived, and Lilian was carried off, surrounded by the crowd of bearers, and accompanied by Bhagut, who soon made her over to her faithful ayah's care.

Nor was the evening's entertainment continued, for even those whose nerves were of the strongest could not but feel that, though all seemed so secure, there might too surely exist sources of danger hitherto unsuspected, and how it was more than necessary, while maintaining an unruffled front, to be ready to meet a sudden crisis with boldness and promptitude.

Naturally Edward Slingsby had been one of the first to assist Lilian in her distress, and so it happened that involuntarily on his part he had caught some of the strange words she had spoken, and the unsatisfactory replies of her servant. Coupling these with what he had seen and listened to on the night of his vigil at Spencer's bungalow, Slingsby came to suspect there might be some connection between the disturbance that had just taken place and the bearer Bhagut ; and, if this were so, might it not go further ? Might not Bhagut's brother, the Russaldar, be implicated, and, if he, why not others still ?

And then—Lilian herself ? Bhagut, as Slingsby

remembered, had said she visited a Brahmin ; that the holy man was influencing her, and that good might come of it. What did all that mean ? Was it possible that this beautiful girl was not her own mistress ? that she was yielding to the influence of her servant, who, as Slingsby was aware, came of a high-caste race ; and was the bearer abusing his trust ?

Remembering the more than cousinly relations that subsisted between this girl and her whom he acknowledged to himself that he loved—Edith Spencer—Slingsby considered how he had best act, or whether there were at present any grounds whatever for action on his part ; and he was forced to acknowledge there were none. All was suspicion ; of certainty there was nothing ; a false step might do infinite harm, and he therefore felt his course must be one of simple watchfulness.

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It was several hours past midnight, and Slingsby lay awake uneasily in his bed, ready to spring up at a moment's notice. Everything was quiet

except that the usual wild shrieking of the jackals rent the air as they prowled round in search of their prey, and now and again the challenge of the sentries could be heard as they kept their guard round the lines of the cantonment.

Was it a dream or a veritable reality? Certainly something was there, rising out of the floor, and growing higher and higher, till it had the semblance of a superhuman height. Yes, it was a man, his head swathed in a white pugaree, his eyes small and restless, his beard long and venerable; and when at length this mysterious apparition silently gave the military salute Slingsby recognised the Seikh native officer Heera Singh.

Before he could speak the old man had knelt down beside him, placing his finger on his lip as a sign of caution.

"What does this mean, Heera Singh?" asked the young officer in surprise. "It is late for you to visit me."

"Sahib, I have come to warn you," answered the Seikh, hardly above his breath. "Enemies are

near us where you least would expect to find them, and men whom your honours think faithful are plotting against you, and seeking to destroy your raj."

"But this is quite new ; we have heard nothing of it before."

"No, sahib, it has not gone on long, or I should have told you," replied the Seikh.

"Then why is it, and what can be the reason of it?" asked Slingsby, still incredulous.

"Well," whispered the old man, "you know, sahib, the extraordinary reports that have been arriving from different parts of the country, the terrible news that comes every morning of mutinies, and revolts, and burnings, and murders?"

"I do, indeed, Heera Singh; but I trust we shall be spared."

The old Seikh shook his head.

"The voice that spoke to-night at the nautch, the invocation that was uttered by that inspired being, has had a great effect."

"Have they found him—is it known who he is?" asked Slingsby, with interest.

"No, sahib ; he was too quick for them." Then in a lower voice, "Perhaps they were not anxious to stop him—hah?"

"I see your meaning too well ; there was treachery then, and connivance on the part of some of our men?"

"Sahib, they are arming even now, and saddling their horses. Let me counsel you to fly while there is yet time." He spoke with an earnestness there was no mistaking.

"Never, Heera Singh! that is impossible, though my horse stands saddled in the stable. I must away instantly to the lines, for when I call on them I know the men will be faithful, and will obey my commands. Syce, bring my horse."

"Dear master, the men are mad, and know not what they do!" cried the old man, in great distress. "Even my five-and-twenty Seikh friends are disturbed, and, though true to the core, dare hardly show themselves so."

"Now, let us go!" cried Slingsby, buckling on

his sword, and mounting and riding off. "There is not a moment to spare."

The old Seikh followed, as he would have done to the death, murmuring, "Ah, these are sad times—sad times indeed !"

In two minutes Slingsby was amongst the men.

"What means all this?" he cried, as he found them hurrying to and fro, armed to the teeth, the horses many of them saddled, and every preparation being made for action.

"We are to be attacked ; it is said the enemy will be on us in an hour ; but we have sworn to protect the officers and ladies, sahib."

So spoke Secunder Khan as he saluted Slingsby, while the troopers stood round casting significant glances at each other and frowning, and feeling their sword-blades in an ominous fashion.

"Attacked!—by whom? Enemy!—what enemy?" cried Slingsby ; "there is no enemy, and that you know right well, Secunder Khan. Where is Russaldar Ram Dyall?"

"He is out to-night, sahib, with the Colonel's

leave," replied the native officer without hesitation.

"Then I command you all instantly to disarm!" thundered out Slingsby. "There is no enemy near; when one comes you shall fight him, I promise you. The first man to disobey shall be brought before the Colonel and summarily tried."

"Back, brothers! To your lines without a word!" exclaimed Secunder Khan. "You hear the words of the Captān-sahib, and know that he speaks truth."

They fell back, cowed; the crisis was over, and soon all was quiet again in the lines, the personal influence of Slingsby over his men being extraordinary. But a time was at hand when personal and private influences were to be swept aside by the rush of events that far transcended the wildest anticipations of those who were to be actors in them.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EVENING DRIVE.

"THE scoundrels!" exclaimed Colonel Scott, when he had heard the alarming intelligence Slingsby brought. "How dare they say such things, even if they are fools enough to think them?"

"Their minds are being poisoned, Colonel, in some way, for their demeanour is utterly changed—I am certain of it," said Slingsby, with emphasis.

"Well, you have done good service by crushing the thing at once; there was no time to lose, Slingsby."

"No, sir; but I had only to order, and they obeyed."

"Quite so; you can make them do anything,"

observed the Colonel. "They are like children in many ways."

"But remember, they are really men, armed and trained as soldiers," rejoined Slingsby; "a dangerous machine to be led or misled after the manner of children."

This remark made an evident impression on the Colonel, for he looked very grave.

"It is my duty, much as I regret it, to report this occurrence to the General. You must accompany me, Slingsby, to his quarters."

"Yes, sir; of course."

"There is a point that puzzles me, about Ram Dyall. He was reported absent, with my leave, you say?"

"Secunder Khan declared so, sir," answered Slingsby.

"Then it is a lie!" exclaimed the Colonel, abruptly. "I never gave the Russaldar this permission. Is it likely that I should, when affairs are in such a condition as they are in now?"

"Certainly it did seem odd to me," said Slingsby, "but I had no time to think."

"No, no ; but I have had time to think, and have decided to try Ram Dyall by court-martial unless he can explain his absence to my complete satisfaction."

"I was informed on my way here that he had gone to visit his priest, a holy Brahmin, not far off," put in Slingsby, cautiously.

"Priest or no priest, Brahmin or no Brahmin, he must render an account of his doings last night," said the Colonel, decisively, as he put the final touch to his dressing and went out into the verandah. "'Tis early yet, and the General will not have gone out for his ride ; we shall just catch him."

There was considerable bustle at the General's, for already a report had reached him of the disturbance among the Lancers, and he welcomed Colonel Scott's appearance with warmth. There was a rapid consultation among the officers present, for all the principal ones at the station

had now assembled, and, when Slingsby had given his account of what had occurred, it was felt that the suspicious absence of the Russaldar, and the apparently unreasonable agitation among the troopers, pointed to a danger not the less real because it could not be traced to any specific source.

"Yes, Colonel Scott, your Russaldar will find it difficult to excuse himself," said General Davis; "but of course you must hear his explanation before judging him."

"He is a man I have trusted implicitly," replied the Colonel, "and his influence is great in the regiment."

"I know that well, but this is no time for dallying. Moreover," continued the General, "I regret to say the deepest suspicion rests on your men generally, and I shall have to take decided measures in consequence."

All assembled wondered what was coming, for it was evident the General's mind was made up.

"The Artillery will move into a position op-

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posite to and commanding the Lancers' lines, guarded by a company of the Red Dirks, and will remain encamped there till further orders; the guns to be kept loaded and ready for action. You will immediately see to this, Captain Bryce, and take care that the necessary orders are issued," said the General, turning to his staff-officer.

"Yes, sir, it shall be done instantly," replied the latter.

"You understand your orders, Major Annesley?" asked the General, looking at the Artillery officer.

"Perfectly, sir, and within half-an-hour we shall be in the position you indicate." And he galloped off to turn out his battery.

"Now, Scott, I am very sorry for this," said General Davis presently, when they were left alone together; "but it's the only thing to do to ensure the safety of the cantonment and of all that depends on it."

"It may be so, I admit," replied the Colonel, sorrowfully; "but 'tis hard for me to acknowledge the justice of it, thinking as I do of my men, and

trusting them as I have done for twenty years and more."

"I know all that, my friend," said the General, kindly, "and I feel for you deeply; but it is necessary to think for all, to consider what is best for all, and in doing so to cast aside every private sentiment one may have."

"Yes, I see, of course," responded the Colonel; "and yet to think of these men, whom I have led through three campaigns, who have fought under me in the swamps of Burmah and the snows of Cabul, being under such terrible suspicion as this."

"Good morning, Colonel Scott, you are here early!" exclaimed Mrs. Davis, coming round from the other side of the bungalow. "But I have noticed a great bustle this morning, while dressing, and you and the General look grave. There is nothing wrong, I hope?"

"I will explain it to her quietly, Scott," interposed the General; "but everything must go on as usual, you know. Keep the men at work with parades and all the regular routine."

"Certainly, sir," answered the Colonel; "but there is one request I would make. Should anything happen, may I send Lilian over to you? You have the European soldiers of the Red Dirks close by, so that it may be safer here."

"Of course, of course," the General said, kindly; "send her to us at any time; we shall always be delighted to have her, and will take the greatest care of her, for you know how my wife loves her."

"Thank you, thank you deeply!" exclaimed the poor Colonel. "Now, good morning, for I must be off to see how matters are getting on."

So saying, and after shaking hands with Mrs. Davis, he was gone.

The day passed quietly, the movements ordered by the General being effected with a decisive promptitude which disarmed criticism. Russaldar Ram Dyall had full opportunity of making an explanation of his unauthorised absence at this critical time, but, as it was deemed highly unsatisfactory, he was placed under arrest with a view of his being tried next day.

The time of the evening drive had come, and Colonel Scott took his niece in the buggy by the long road which led towards the city, and then made a considerable round into the country beyond. They had come back to within half-a-mile of the cantonment, and were allowing the horse to walk quietly along, when, in approaching a grove of mango trees close to the road, Lilian fancied she saw the flutter of a white garment among the trunks. It was but for a moment, yet she was surprised, as there was no village near, and the place generally was deserted.

"Who can it be in the tope there?" she said to her uncle. "I certainly caught sight of someone moving among the trees."

"Very unlikely, my child," observed the Colonel, "for I don't know that I ever noticed a human being at that spot. There is no well, so people never encamp there, and it's only in the mango season, when the fruit is ripe, that the natives care to go near it."

But the Colonel was wrong, for the next instant

there was the crack of a shot, and a bullet passed through the cover of the buggy so close to him as to graze his cheek, and this was followed by the sharp discharge of two other pieces, though without result, as the balls flew harmlessly overhead.

"The villains ! they want to murder us !" cried the Colonel, excitedly. "Take the reins, darling, and drive on, while I arrest them on the spot. Lucky I came out armed."

So saying, he drew the revolver from his belt, and was about to jump down, when Lilian, now fully alive to the danger, held him fast.

"No, dear uncle, no !" she exclaimed ; "you shall not commit such madness. They would certainly murder you—you shall not throw your life away so !"

"But I insist—child, let go, I say——"

Another bullet now struck the step on Lilian's side and glanced off, and immediately after a man could be seen running on in front in a direction parallel to the road, as if to head them.

Why, that's that fellow Buldeo, Ram Dyal's

nephew!" cried the Colonel, still struggling to be free. "And, my God! Lily," looking out hastily, "the others are his two cousins; and they seem bent on getting our lives."

There was not an instant to lose, for with drawn sabres the men were on them, cutting furiously at the Colonel, who, however, dropped the foremost with a shot from his pistol. The reins were in Lilian's hands, and she, keeping her head admirably, urged the horse into a gallop, leaving behind the other disappointed trooper, who contented himself with firing an ineffectual shot after them at long range.

As they approached the man named Buldeo they saw him drop on one knee and take steady aim.

"Do you know whom you are attempting to murder, you budmāsh?" shouted the Colonel at him. "Do you not see who it is, and that the Missy-baba is beside me?"

The answer came in the ball which only too truly found its billet in the body of the poor horse. Down he went with a crash, while the Colonel and

Lilian were rudely shaken from their seats and precipitated on to the road, where the former lay stunned and helpless, while his niece, luckily escaping with a bruised shoulder, ran round to his assistance. The murdering villains now had it all their own way, for seeing the effect of the last shot they came with exulting leaps towards their victims, and, disdaining to fire, flourished their cruel tulwars in the air, already triumphing by anticipation in the massacre of the Europeans.

Hark ! what was that ?

A clatter upon the road, a cloud of dust in front, the rapid gallop of a couple of horsemen, and Slingsby and Walter Spencer, while out for their evening ride, having seen from a distance the fall of the horse, made all on a sudden their appearance on the spot of the supposed accident to render what help they could.

“ Why, Lily ! ” cried her cousin, throwing himself off hastily, “ what an unlucky mishap. I hope the Colonel is not much hurt, or you either, for the matter of that.”

"I—no," she said, looking scared and white ;
"but I am afraid my uncle—oh, those men,
where are they? they will kill us!"

"Nonsense! what do you mean?" he exclaimed.
"By Jove! what is Slingsby about? I saw a man
running up, and fancied he was coming to help
you."

"No, indeed, Walter; he was going to *murder*
us!" cried the poor girl in an agony of horror and
alarm, yet thankful beyond measure at the unex-
pected turn matters had taken. "They shot the
poor horse from a distance, and then——"

"Oh—h—h! Lily, are you there?" exclaimed
the Colonel, opening his eyes feebly.

"Here, uncle—yes, look at me, dear. You will
soon be better, will not you?" she asked, bending
over him tenderly.

"My pistol—at once! Where is it? That
villain Buldeo, he will be on us in a moment,"
murmured the Colonel, sitting up and looking
round.

"No, no fear of him now; make yourself easy,"

she said. "He has run off, and will find it hard to escape Captain Slingsby, who is after him. And here is Walter come to help us; is it not lucky?"

"You are not much hurt, sir, I hope?" asked Spencer, who now began to understand something of the true state of things. "Only shaken, I hope, not wounded?"

"No, no, I'm all right—all right now. But how was it you came at that moment? I don't understand."

"Well, sir, Slingsby and I were out rather late for a gallop, and, perceiving an accident, naturally came to see if we could be of use. Here I am, but Slingsby is off across country after that fellow, who seems a fine runner, and is showing him a clean pair of heels; but then he had a good start."

"Buldeo! one of our greatest athletes. To think he should be such a ruffian. And where is the other, Lily?" asked the Colonel, standing up and looking back along the road.

"He also has disappeared, uncle. Now what is

to be done?" said the girl, anxiously. "Oh, Walter, we must get home, and the poor horse is done for, I fear."

And indeed it was so, for after a few convulsive kicks the animal lay dead before them.

"Never mind, Lily," cried Spencer, cheeringly; "my nag goes well in harness, so do you and the Colonel just lend a hand, and we'll soon put him between the shafts, which luckily don't seem much the worse for the fall."

So saying, he set to work to unloose the dead horse and replace him with the living, a matter in which the others gladly assisted; and in a few minutes, all being ready, the three took their seats in the buggy, having at their feet Spencer's saddle and bridle. The drive home was one that to Lilian at any rate was the most delightful in her remembrance, for to the sense of thankfulness at having been preserved from a cruel death was added the ineffable joy of knowing that that preservation was in a great measure due to the man who of all was dearest to her heart. As she sat there, in that

narrow space between her uncle and her young cousin, what wonder that she asked herself if he could possibly be ignorant of her devotion to him—if he were really blind to the deep affection she bore him?

CHAPTER IX.

CONDEMNED.

THE court-martial assembled early on the morning fixed for the trial of Russaldar Ram Dyall, whose case, in consequence of the attempt on Colonel Scott's life by the three relatives of the native officer, had assumed a very serious aspect. Indeed Buldeo and his cousins, who had been easily captured, the former by Slingsby, who overtook him just as he had reached the cavalry lines, were, it was finally decided, to be put upon their defence at the same time. One of them had been wounded, it was true, by the shot from Colonel Scott's pistol, but the injury was only a flesh-wound in the leg, and he was able without difficulty to take his place with the others before the Court.

The prisoners having been charged and pleaded

not guilty, proceedings were carried on with the greatest deliberation and fairness towards the accused ; but the proofs of guilty knowledge on the part of the Russaldar of the plot to assassinate the Colonel, even if he had not been the prompter of it, were so overwhelming that the minor charge respecting his suspicious absence without leave on the night of the disturbance in the lines was not pressed. At first, assuming a bold and defiant air, he denied all cognizance of the intended crime ; but when the old Seikh, Heera Singh, and another trusty man of his troop had given the details of a most compromising conversation they had by chance overheard between Ram Dyall and his nephew Buldeo, his aspect changed, and, casting fierce looks of hatred at the hostile witnesses, he seemed to despair of making an adequate confutation of the weight of evidence that was brought against him. In vain did his defender attempt to shake the credibility of the witnesses, in vain did he try to show that their statements were misleading and false, in vain did he appeal to the long

service and gallant deeds of the Russaldar, who from a simple trooper had risen in the course of his thirty years' service to the position he now occupied, as showing how impossible it was he could have so disgraced himself. The Court heard with the utmost patience every word that could be urged either in defence or in extenuation, but those present all felt that the crime had been proved to the hilt, and that the issue was not for a moment doubtful.

Then came the turn of the trooper Buldeo and his two companions; but this was a simpler matter, the evidence of Colonel Scott, of Slingsby, and of Spencer being direct and unshakable. The men seemed indeed to glory in their treacherous intention, Buldeo averring in a loud and insolent tone that their religion was threatened, and they had only to regret their failure to strike a blow for it with the success which had crowned the efforts of their friends in other quarters. Yet one circumstance struck a jarring note on the ear of the court. These men, though not denying for a

moment their own guilt, solemnly and unanimously declared the Russaldar Ram Dyall to be no participator in it, and, while scowling fiercely at the Seikhs who had borne the strongest and most scathing testimony against him, implored the members to visit the punishment of their crime on them, and on them alone.

Having sat for several hours the Court adjourned for a short interval ; then, meeting again for a time before evening, it sent its judgment in for confirmation. This was given the following day by the General, the sentence being promulgated in the evening orders and read at the head of every regiment of the garrison of Jahmere :—"That Russaldar Ram Dyall, and the troopers Buldeo, Purtab, and Kasi, of the Lucknow Lancers, having been found guilty of the attempt to murder Colonel Scott and his niece while out driving, on the 21st June, 1857, near the cantonment of Jahmere, be executed at a general parade of all the troops, to be held the next morning, by being blown from guns."

"Missy Lily," cried the voice of the bearer Bhagut, as he presented himself to his mistress that evening, trembling and miserably unhinged, "you have heard the dreadful news, and know what is to happen?"

"No, Bhagut, I have not; but of course these men have been found guilty," she answered, not caring to name them on account of their near connection with the old man."

"Oh, the three who turned traitors, and would have committed murder—yes, they were bound to die, and right well they deserve it!" he replied.

"Well," said Lilian, "I am glad you see that."

"Dear Missy, it is not their fate that I think of; it is that Ram Dyall, my own innocent brother, has been condemned."

"Ram Dyall, the Russaldar?" interrupted Lilian.

"Yes, indeed, it is too true, too dreadfully true," cried the wretched man, throwing himself at her feet and sobbing like a child.

"Bhagut, this is indeed terrible," she murmured.

"My poor old friend, what do they accuse him of? I know, of course, that he was absent one night without permission, but we believed he had only gone to visit the reverend father, the Brahmin, in his abode at the temple. Where was the harm of that if the holy one had called him?"

"Where, indeed, Missy?" echoed Bhagut, who probably was not fully aware of the course matters had finally taken at the trial.

"Then they blame him and condemn him for it?" asked she.

"Ah, dear Missy, worse, far worse than that. They have found him equally guilty with Buldeo and the others of—of——"

"What, Bhagut? They think he wished to murder——"

"Yes, indeed; that is their decision," said he under his breath; "that he knew what Buldeo intended, and approved of it."

Lilian shuddered.

"Have you seen your brother?" she asked, after a pause, looking anxiously at the bearer.

"No," he answered sadly, "I have not tried to see him, but I must do so *to-night*."

"Why to-night?" said she, noting the strange inflection of his voice.

"Because to-morrow morning he is to die, to be blown into the air ; he, a Brahmin, to be made carrion of, for the jackals and the dogs to pick up."

Again Lilian trembled, for she well knew the significance of these words.

"How horrible!" she murmured ; then, after a moment, "But he is guiltless, absolutely guiltless. They dare never commit such an atrocity as this ; they shall not carry out such a sentence !"

"Alas ! dear Missy, who is to prevent them ? The General-sahib alone has full power, and he is clearly against my brother," said the bearer, sorrowfully.

"I will go to the General myself," cried the girl, "and will plead for the Russaldar's life. Quick ! Order the palki, and I will start at once."

While hurrying off to obey this command, Bhagut encountered the Colonel, returning after his melancholy day's work.

"Hallo!" exclaimed the latter; "what now, Bhagut, is the excitement?"

The bearer salaamed low, and then stood with his head sunk on his breast in an attitude of the deepest despair.

"Ah, I see, you know what has occurred. No one regrets it more than I—no one. There, take my sword. It has been a sad day for us all, a miserable day." And the Colonel divested himself of his belts and cap, and threw himself into an easy chair in the verandah. "Where is your young mistress? I must see her," he continued.

Silently the old servant pointed to the inner rooms, and at that moment Lilian appeared, dressed to go out.

"Dearest uncle," she cried, moving quickly to his side, "can this be true? Is it possible you will allow Ram Dyall——"

"Hush, Lily; hush, darling!" exclaimed the Colonel rapidly, while motioning to the bearer to leave them alone together; "we must be cautious how we speak—danger is round us on every hand."

"But my own old servant and friend, Bhagut," said she reproachfully, "surely you do not suspect him of betraying us?"

"Bhagut is the brother of Ram Dyall, and Ram Dyall is a traitor!" rejoined the Colonel, shortly.

"'Tis impossible!" cried the girl, recoiling from him in amazement. "And that you, uncle, should say this."

"I say what I know, Lily, and what has been proved beyond a shadow of doubt," said the Colonel, gravely. "Ram Dyall's complicity is absolutely certain, and of course his fate is as certain. You know what it is to be?"

"I have heard the dreadful decision," murmured Lilian, faintly; "but I hoped by intercession with the General that something might be done."

"Useless, utterly useless, my child!" the Colonel exclaimed. "The General's mind is thoroughly made up, the orders are issued, the arrangements made. There is more, far more in this than I can tell you, and your interference might bring trouble on others."

She looked at him with a dazed expression.

"I know not what your suggestion is," she said slowly, "and cannot divine the General's motives; but this I can tell—that if Ram Dyall is shamefully sacrificed great harm will befall."

"What do you mean, Lily, by saying that?" asked the Colonel, regarding her with anxiety; "and how dare you speak so of what you do not understand?"

"Uncle," answered she after a moment's consideration, "I am but a girl, that is true; yet I have means of knowing more perhaps than you think, and my sympathies lead me to appreciate in a higher and intenser degree the motives of those around us than either you or General Davis can do."

It was the Colonel's turn to express himself with decision.

"Here," said he, "have been a fair trial and a perfectly impartial judgment, and it is not for you or me, deeply as we regret it, to interfere. If those there are who sympathise with the Russaldar, let

them beware. His death should be a warning to them ; may they take it to heart and profit by it."

Lilian was struck dumb for some seconds by this speech.

"Am I, then," she asked despairingly, "really to take off my things—may I not go to the General, as I have promised Bhagut to do?"

"It would be useless, my child, to undertake such an errand," answered the Colonel, soothingly, "however natural on your part. No, there are deeper considerations involved than I can explain. Hah ! what is that behind yonder pillar?"

As he spoke a figure stole towards them with a wary tread ; it was that of the young Mahomedan officer Secunder Khan, who now, seeing he was noticed, stood forward more boldly and saluted.

"Well !" exclaimed the Colonel, apparently not over pleased at his visit, "what now, Secunder Khan?"

"All is well in the lines, Protector of the poor. I thought you would like to have a report from me, your humble slave, at this time."

"Good," answered the Colonel, but with some impatience in his tone ; then added, "I do not remember ordering you to come here this evening."

"Incomparable lord !" replied the man, glancing at Lilian, who stood apparently lost in a fit of abstraction beside her uncle, "knowing as I do the anxiety you must feel, I have ventured to approach in order to renew my protestations of fidelity, sworn on the holy Korān, towards both you and the Missy-sahib, whom God protect !"

He bowed low at these words. The Colonel frowned, yet spoke gently in reply.

"You mean well, Secunder, and I thank you. These are times when one likes to know one's true friends from the false."

Again the Mahomedan glanced at Lilian, who, becoming aware of the attention he was paying her, was about to leave the verandah.

"Should anything happen—should things go wrong, which God forbid"—began the young man, speaking rapidly, "I pray you, Protector of your men, to remember me. Especially should danger

threaten the Missy-sahib, I would ask you to trust me ; I have means at hand which will ensure her safety. Oh ! let your and her devoted slave know that his humble services will be acceptable."

The Colonel looked at him in some astonishment, and even Lilian paused ; but at that moment the palki was rapidly brought up by the bearers, and further conversation was at an end.

" You have permission to go," said the Colonel to Secunder Khan. Then, with emphasis, " I shall consider your offer, strange though it sounds at this moment, and meantime I thank you for whatever good towards me and mine your intentions contain."

" Salaam, sahib, salaam," was the respectful reply, and, after another salute to Lilian, the Mahomedan was gone.

" What do you think of him ? " asked Lilian as her uncle rose to pass into his room.

" I am not sure, child, what to think," said the Colonel gravely ; " his words are fair, and yet——"

" Trust him not, dear uncle," she interrupted ; " he is false for all his fair words ! I know it. ! "

Frowning, the Colonel left her ; and she, turning to Bhagut, spoke with sorrow in her voice.

“No,” she said, “I cannot go ; I am not permitted to go to-night. Take away the palki, and send Chahni to me if she is back yet from the bazaar.”

The bearer bowed submissively, but could not help giving a look of deep reproach at his mistress.

“I will explain it all to-morrow,” she continued under her breath ; “but interference is out of the question I find, deeply to my regret.”

The poor man seemed stunned at this intelligence, knowing it to be a death-blow to any hope he might have entertained for his brother ; yet he gave in a calm voice the order to the palki bearers to depart, and summoned the ayah from within.

“You have returned, Chahni,” exclaimed Lilian, as the white figure stood before her ; “take my bonnet and gloves, I shall not require them just now.”

“No, Missy-baba, you must not go out to-night,

for they are saying strange things in the bazaar—things that make one tremble to think of,” murmured the ayah.

“What things, Chahni, can they be that have frightened you so?” asked Lilian in a pitying tone. “My poor old ayah, you are indeed unhinged.”

“They say,” she whispered, shudderingly, “that the British raj is coming to an end, that not a European will be left in the country, for all will be killed or driven out of it.”

“And you believe such nonsense as that?” said Lilian, unable to avoid smiling. “Really by this time I should have expected you understood the Company-Bahadoor better, though you are but a woman.”

“Ah,” continued the faithful creature, shaking her head ominously, “the English are few and their enemies are many. What if a second Cabul were at hand?”

These words, forced out as they seemed to be by the fears that had been excited in Chahni’s breast, made an instant impression on Lilian, for she well

understood their import, but with admirable tact she strove to allay the old ayah's alarm.

"The bazaar is a sad place for gossip, Chahni, and if I were you I would be more careful of whom I spoke to there," she said ; "and as to Cabul, the circumstances are entirely changed in every way. Surely you must see this."

But Chahni only moaned while moving uneasily away, and it was no wonder that her mistress, deeply impressed by her warning, resolved to find out for herself from sources she deemed infallible, the truth or falsehood of these bazaar reports.

CHAPTER X.

A PARADE.

THE grey light of dawn had hardly begun to appear when the preparations for the parade of the whole garrison of Jahmere were in full swing, regiment after regiment taking up its appointed position so as to form three sides of a hollow square, in the centre of which was the battery, the guns pointing outwards into the open plain beyond. The Red Dirks were drawn up close to the guns, the Lucknow Lancers being disposed at some distance on the flank, while the other corps were aligned in the space between, which had been duly allotted them. A dead silence prevailed for some minutes, broken only by the occasional movement

of a horse, or the direction of an officer to close the ranks where his critical eye detected some irregularity of formation.

Suddenly in the distance could be seen a little cloud of dust, and, as the gongs were sounding the hour, the party of horsemen that emerged from it proved to be the General and his staff, who rode up at a gallop and took their places in rear of the battery, the troops giving a general salute. This over, and the four prisoners having been marched out in front of him, the General made a short and stirring address in the following words :—

“Soldiers of the Jahmere division,—

“I need not tell you the reason of your being paraded here this morning. You are aware of it already ; you know it as well as I do. After a full and patient trial the prisoners have been unanimously found guilty of the most heinous crime that soldiers can commit, and for that crime there is but one punishment—death. But so aggravated were the circumstances in this case that the Court has ordered the execution to be per-

formed by blowing from guns, and I have confirmed the sentence.

“It may be that these unhappy men were misled by some of the disaffected and traitorous agitators who are at present seeking, in many parts of the country, to corrupt the mind of the Army ; if so, let others take warning from their fate, and remember that the Government, ready and willing as it is to reward those who serve it loyally and well, is equally determined to crush with a relentless hand all who violate their oaths and betray their trust.

“May a death such as this overtake every traitor to the Company-Bahadoor, and every soldier who is untrue to his salt.”

He ceased, but his words, spoken in a clear and manly voice, had penetrated to the furthest man in the ranks before him, and the calm that prevailed showed the intense interest they had excited in the minds of those to whom they were addressed.

At a sign from the staff-officer the prisoners were led forward and placed each of them in front

of a gun, while their war medals and decorations were torn from their breasts, so that all might see the degradation and disgrace that had befallen them. At this juncture each was seized by a couple of sturdy gunners, who with strong cords bound him across the muzzle of the piece, which had just previously been charged ; and then it was in that last look round on the familiar scene before him, and ere taking the imminent plunge into the vast unknown, that Russaldar Ram Dyall, forgetful somewhat of his previous oaths and protestations, shouted out in a loud voice—

“ I die a victim to the usurpers, my brethren ! I die that you all may be free ! I, a Brahmin, a holy man, die this foul and disgraceful death, but 'tis in the name and for the sake of religion, and my fate shall be avenged.”

“ Number one—ready ! Number one—fire ! ” interrupted a voice with decision.

The flash of the port-fire was seen over the gun, a rapid boom was heard, and next moment all that remained of Russaldar Ram Dyall was a few

fragments of flesh and bone whistling through the air.

“Number two—ready! Number two—fire!” again was the command; and, without a word, the trooper Buldeo had passed amid smoke and flame to his account.

And so with the others.

Then there was silence, amid which the General rode off the ground, wisely leaving the lesson that had been read to them to sink fresh and undiluted into the minds of the soldiery. The parade was at an end, and next minute the regimental bands were playing their respective corps back to their barracks and lines, the guns of the Artillery being again placed in a position to rake those of the Lancers.

But though everything had passed off so smoothly that morning, the mind of General Davis was ill at ease. Later than in many parts of the country, yet none the less inevitably, the wave of mutiny and rebellion was spreading to Jahmere; alarming reports were brought in daily from the

districts around ; outpost after outpost had fallen, several parties of hard-pressed fugitives had reached the shelter of the cantonment and had been distributed among the residents there and at the neighbouring civil station, while terribly sad accounts came in of others who had been less fortunate and had fallen miserably by the way, almost within sight of the shelter they had striven to reach.

“ There is one thing I must have done,” said the General, as the usual council of the senior members of the community, both civil and military, met at his bungalow that morning. “ The post has ceased to run for a week, and I have a most important despatch to send to Ahtabad. Of course the country is all up, and it would be a dangerous mission.”

“ Will you entrust it to me, sir?” exclaimed Moody of the Red Dirks, now quite recovered from his wound. “ With a good horse I could compass the distance in twenty-four hours, and might be back here on the third day.”

The General considered a few moments, and then took Moody quietly apart.

"It would be better for you to have a companion," he said, "that is if I agree to your going at all, Moody. You see it is a service of danger, and if anything happened to you——"

"Yes, sir, you are right ; it would not do to risk the safety of the errand on one life," remarked the Major, contemplatively.

"Well, as you offer to undertake this matter, and I know no one who could perform it so well, you shall choose your friend ; that, I think, is only fair."

Moody smiled at this consideration on the General's part.

"Then may I select young Walter Spencer of my regiment, sir?" he asked. "He is brave, a first-rate rider, and will be charmed, I know, to have such an adventure."

"Very well, Moody, take the boy, and take care of him!" exclaimed the General, kindly.

"Tis a grand opportunity for him to prove the

stuff he is made of. You have no need to give any such proof of courage and devotion."

"Then I will warn him for the duty, and we shall start this morning, sir?" enquired Moody.

"No, this afternoon will do, and then you will have the cool night before you," was the reply. "You have yet to inform Spencer, and he will have preparations to make, poor lad."

"Very good, sir; then I go at once to his quarters to communicate your orders?"

"Yes, and not a word of your actual destination to any but Spencer, remember. Good morning, and good luck."

"Good morning, sir." And with an unconcerned air Moody cantered off.

"I've come to say good-bye for a few days, Lily," exclaimed Walter Spencer, cheerily, as he shook hands in her drawing-room with his cousin that forenoon. "I don't like to go without seeing you and the Colonel first, but I haven't much time."

"Why, where are you going?" asked Lilian in surprise. "My uncle had not told me of this."

"No, it's only just arranged, and he knows nothing about it perhaps. Indeed, you must not speak of it to any of the natives, or at all, in fact, though people will—Why," cried he, "what's the matter, Lily? You look very ill."

"It's the heat, I think," she said quickly; "but tell me, Walter, what all this means."

"It means that Moody and I are going on a secret mission—I may not say where—and you won't see us again just yet awhile. I may confide to you that Moody picked me out to accompany him," answered the young man, proudly.

"Ah, I see; this is a dangerous errand you are bent upon for all you speak so lightly of it," she returned, gravely.

"Well, it's just a longish ride, Lily, which we shall both enjoy," replied he, gaily; "far better than being cooped up here, and having to attend parades like this morning's."

"Walter, pray don't speak so. It is too sad—too terrible!" she cried.

"Wretched!" responded he. "Wretched! May I never see it again."

She looked at him with gratitude in her eyes—gratitude, and perhaps something more than gratitude.

"You are my own cousin," she said, "and Edith's brother—Edith, who is to me as a dear sister."

"Yes, Lily, that is true," answered he, wonderingly, for Lilian had never spoken so before.

"Is it not natural then," she asked, "that I should feel as—as—Edith would feel were she with us here?"

"Well," he said, his surprise increasing as she went on, "you are not exactly a sister, though as a cousin, of course——"

"Ah, Walter," she interrupted, "I know the daring spirit of Major Moody, and feel satisfied this is a desperate enterprise in which he has engaged you. Think of Edith and of your father, and—and—of us all."

She half rose from the sofa as she spoke, and it was while the sweet appealing accents of her last

words rang in his ear that the sense of what this girl's affection for him amounted to was borne in upon Walter Spencer's mind.

"Lily!" he exclaimed, almost breathlessly, for a flood of passionate emotion urging him this way and that had suddenly broken over him, "Lily, you do not know what you are insensibly asking from me. The circumstances are such—but that will never do."

"No, Walter," she murmured faintly, sinking back on to the sofa, "I could not wish—I should not dare—for a moment to interpose. Forgive me, if I have been wrong. Say you forgive me—that you will think of me kindly."

"Of course, of course," he answered quickly, rising as if to go. "There is nothing to forgive, only—your—anxiety about me, just like what Edith's would be."

With an effort she rose too, but there was a deadly pallor in her face that shocked him.

"Edith's?" she whispered, hoarsely; "ah, yes, Edith's."

"Besides," continued he, "I shall return; 'tis really nothing but a long ride."

"Nothing but a long ride," she said, mechanically. "Nothing more? Nothing more than a ride?"

"Well, I expect not. Of course one can't be sure of what may happen; but you will give us your good wishes, Lily, in our enterprise?"

This was spoken almost with gaiety, and indeed his heart had been high within him but a moment ago, and he strove to set aside the despair of the girl before him—a despair that was now only too evident to him in every movement and in every word of hers.

"Nay," she murmured, more to herself as it seemed than to him, "'tis no right of mine to object, and perhaps ere long my duty may call me, too, to make some sacrifice—to incur some danger."

"Danger is round us on every hand, Lily," whispered Spencer, not wholly understanding her

meaning, but catching at her last words. "It's useless to deny it; you have already had some proof of this; but if what I hear is true, and this is a religious movement, there may be much more behind."

"What is it you would suggest?" she asked looking dreadfully scared. "Ah, Walter, something tells me—some conviction comes over me—that I shall never see you again! And yet you are so young; it does seem hard——"

"Nonsense, Lily," he interrupted; "you really must not take this view. I shall be all right, and if only things are managed properly there need be no trouble at all; certainly none here, where you have the Red Dirks."

"No trouble, you think," she began wildly; then relapsing into a quieter tone, "no, perhaps no trouble to you, while to me—ah, what may it not signify to me!"

Speaking so she raised her hands deprecatingly, as if to shut out the sight of something too

horrible to contemplate, and Spencer, puzzled not less by her gestures than by her words, felt there was a depth in this girl's emotions and in the springs of her conduct far beyond his power to fathom.

"Well, Lily," he said, after a pause, "good-bye now. I must really go, though it's a little hard to do so when it comes to the point. Give my farewells to the Colonel ; I must be off."

She shook his hand without a word ; he could but too readily guess the reason of that ; and next moment his horse's hoofs were heard upon the drive as he hurried away.

Unfortunate Lilian ! At first, stunned by her utter loneliness, she stood looking at the spot he had left as if in expectation that he would reappear ; then, as a sense of the truth gradually came to her, and she realised what she had lost her head reeled, and she would have fallen but that at the moment the ever-watchful Chahni, who of course had noted the young man's departure, came quickly and silently to her assistance and support.

The old ayah shook her head ominously as she applied her restoratives, for she knew instinctively something of the reason of her young mistress's distress ; yet it may well be doubted if the deeper causes of it were apparent to her.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FERRY.

THE sun's rays were hot, for it was yet early in the afternoon, when Major Moody and Walter Spencer quietly passed out of the cantonment, and, after riding through the principal street of Jahmere, took the main road to Ahtabad. Peace and absolute quietude reigned over everything, and it seemed as if in the sultry quivering air and the fierce light no living creature had the energy to stir, save perhaps that here and there a squirrel peeped out with glistening eyes from the leaves overhead, or a pariah dog lazily left his lair in the roadway, growling at the disturbance caused him by their horses' hoofs.

"The syces looked rather astonished when we told them they need not follow us," remarked Spencer to his companion; "they must have fancied we were in a hurry for our evening ride; but now, I daresay, they have a suspicion we are up to something more than that."

"Well, yes," said the Major, "there's a rare talkee-talkee going on at the stables, I'll be bound; but we shall be many miles off before it reaches the disaffected ones, and they have so much to think of just now that our presence will hardly be missed."

"Then you think the plotting is still going on?" asked Walter with some anxiety.

"I've not the least doubt about it, my dear fellow," replied Moody, "and everyone who is not blind must see it. Of course the executions this morning may have a good effect—I hope they will; but you can hardly expect them to stay the tide of insurrection when it is surging up all round us, and threatens to sweep us away all together."

"I quite see that," said the other, "but with

three companies of the Red Dirks and the Artillery I think the General should hold his own."

"Three weak companies are not enough to defend the barracks if the whole of the native regiments go; and then only think of the civil station, with the Treasury guarded by native police, and the big disaffected city close by."

The younger man shook his head.

"It seems to me there may be more serious danger for those we are leaving here than for you and me," he said, speaking somewhat doubtfully.

Moody glanced searchingly at him ere he replied.

"'Tis a choice of dangers, truly. We don't know yet what is before us, and it's a far cry to Ahtabad."

Spencer seemed lost in thought for a minute; then he spoke again.

"Did you see my cousin Lily, to say good-bye?" he asked. "There was but little time for that sort of thing, but I managed to spare half-an-hour."

"And how did you find her?" asked Moody,

gulping down a strange feeling in his throat, and looking with steadfast eyes before him ; " I had not a moment, however much I should have liked it, to shake her hand."

" Well, I really was almost sorry I went, for, dear girl, she was terribly sad, and made such odd allusions to—well—to my sister at home, and to my going on this expedition, and the danger of it, and to some mysterious sacrifice on her part, and—and—to you, Major—and your well-known desperate bravery, and——"

" We'll have a bit of a trot now," interrupted Moody, feeling this mode of recapitulating Lilian's last-spoken words almost more than he could bear, and giving his horse the rein ; yet his curiosity and deepest interest having been stirred, when presently they again fell into a walk—for it was absolutely necessary to husband the strength of their animals for any emergency that might arise,—he could not resist returning to the subject of Lilian.

" I have understood from Miss Langford," he

began, "that there is an intention on her part of devoting herself to some object which she would not, perhaps could not, explain ; but you, Spencer, who possibly have a better right than I——"

"Now, really, Major, I don't know why you should say that," cried Walter, in some surprise. "She is my cousin, of course ; but beyond that there is nothing—that is, till to-day there has been nothing—to warrant any suggestion of—of——" He stopped suddenly. "And yet, I tell you," he continued, drawing a deep breath, "if I thought Delmar was my rival, that he had gained—but I know that is absurd."

Moody looked at him curiously for a moment.

"From what I have gathered," he said, "there must be someone who is very dear to Miss Langford ; it may be you, Spencer, or it may not—you know that best. But beyond this personal love of hers there is some absorbing interest, some deep-seated passion, which fascinates and governs her in all she does."

"I believe there is a good deal in what you say,

Major," rejoined Spencer, slowly, "for Lily is changed of late—I can't say exactly how."

"Girls do change," muttered Moody in a contemplative tone ; "none knows that better than I. And yet there is a mystery here beyond my power to unravel."

"She seemed to be under some illusion, or in dread of a hidden influence of superior power, as far as I could judge," remarked Walter, remembering Lilian's attitude and gestures just the moment before he left her.

The Major went back some twenty years or more in memory, recalling this girl's mother to his mind, and as he did so a light seemed to dawn upon him, and he found himself thrown into a fever of speculation as to the possibility of her Rajpoot descent being answerable for the puzzling anomalies of her character. The more he thought of this, the more convinced he felt that the explanation of her mental condition and unwonted conduct was to be found in this direction ; yet he hesitated to communicate his ideas to her cousin, at any rate till they

were more fully considered and had met with some confirmation from external sources. Little did he know how far matters had gone with the wretched girl, or to what a terrible depth the fateful circumstances of her birth and surroundings were dragging her !

They had ridden on for some time in silence, for Moody's thoughts wholly engrossed him, and even Spencer gave way to meditations, in the first place on Lilian, and then on the chances of the success of their expedition. The sun had set, and in ordinary times they would have encountered numbers of travellers, either passing along the road or encamped near it, yet hardly a figure was to be seen, save an occasional village boy driving in his cattle and goats for the night amid a cloud of dust, or a zameendar cultivating his land, or watering it from the well by means of the creaking and picturesque wheel that originally came from Persia. From these simple people the two horsemen received the salutations due to their supposed importance, for, dressed and accoutred like the irregu-

lar horsemen of some native chief, they commanded respect by the fear they inspired.

"It can't be more than a couple of miles to the dawk bungalow at Mitti," said Moody, as they cleared a small village and came close to a range of low hills that had been indistinctly visible for some time past.

"I shan't be sorry for a piece of dinner, Major," rejoined Spencer, "or at any rate a cup of tea, and I suppose there is a khansamah there who can do so much for us?"

"I'm not sure about that," replied the elder man, drawing out a map of the district and glancing over it. "The light is so faint I can hardly make this out, but it's quite possible the bungalow is in the hands of the rebels, whom we are certain to come across on the other side of the river—at least so I was warned by the General."

"Then how do you think of proceeding?" asked Walter, "for of course we are not to ride straight into their camp."

"No, no ; trust me for that, young man," was the

reply ; "you won't catch an old shikari tripping so foolishly ; but just keep your eyes open far ahead upon the road, while I look for a bridle-path there should be hereabouts."

After some minutes' careful riding, Walter Spencer spoke again.

"There's no sign of anyone on the road, Major. What do you think of that?" he asked, as Moody, after a short *détour* of inspection through the scrub on the plain, rejoined him.

"I don't like it," he replied, shortly. "There's a reason for it, you may be sure. Ah, here's what I've been expecting—the pugdundi that will take us round."

He struck at once into the footpath, and, followed closely by Spencer, rode rapidly towards the hills to the base of which it conducted them ; then, halting, and letting the reins fall on his horse's neck, he swept the whole region towards the river with his glass, dwelling long on one particular spot.

"Lucky we didn't ride up to the bungalow," he said at last, "or it would have been all over with us,

Spencer, for we should have been in those fellows' hands by this time."

"You don't say so, Major!" cried Walter. "Do let me see what I can make of them with your glass, for it is stronger than mine."

"They are lighting their fires and cooking close to the house, you observe," answered Moody, handing over the glass to his companion. "See how their figures stand out against the flames, for now that darkness is really upon us every minute makes their proceedings more clear and apparent."

"I can see the horses picketed close by them" exclaimed Walter. "And now one of the troopers is mounting and riding off. What does that mean, I wonder?"

"There are two ferries hereabouts," quietly remarked the Major, not noticing the other's question, "and I propose to cross by the upper one—and for two reasons. In the first place it's off the main road, and is, in fact, little frequented except by the cultivators living on the river bank; therefore there's the chance our friends over there may have

neglected it. Next, though there is a strong eddy, and the water swirls and tumbles about in an alarming fashion, the passage is accomplished in half the time the other takes, and this of course is a great advantage."

I see," said Spencer, "and entirely concur in your reasoning."

"Well, then, we'll make for the ferry at Bundia, and hope for luck and a good boat," cried the Major, leading off at a trot.

Fortune favoured them, for when they reached the village of Bundia, perched on its rocky platform above the river, they discovered by careful enquiry that no strangers had invaded it, and were able to rest under a magnificent peepul growing by the roadside, while some milk was presented to them by a friendly inhabitant. Meantime the ferry-boat—there appeared to be but one—having been brought alongside, the horses without much difficulty were got on board, and amid wild yells and gesticulations from the boatmen, several of whom worked in the water, and shouts from a crowd of the villagers,

whose torches threw a lurid and fitful light upon the scene, they started.

At first the rapid current, eddying round and round, carried them almost close along the near shore, where, owing to the lofty and precipitous cliffs, which hung in dark masses above them, the scenery was of the wildest ; indeed, so long did they continue in this course, that Moody felt uneasy, and began to think that treachery was intended, but presently noticing that, as the stream widened and the boiling waters became quiescent, they were perceptibly moving across, his fears ceased to trouble him. The boatmen, all but naked, as they were, had been working literally like demons, for beneath the light of a torch fastened to a short mast, their glistening skins and muscular limbs, and fantastic gestures and wild and inarticulate utterances, lent to them rather the aspect of creatures of some other sphere than of this.

“ Tell me, manji,” said Moody, presently, as the leader ceased for a moment from his labour, “ how far it is to Mitti from here.”

"Three kōs, great sir," replied the man, respectfully ; " we can soon run down if your honour pleases."

"No, never mind about that. If you land us opposite there we can hit on a bye-road that will suit well enough, for we want to get on," answered the Major, looking across the river.

"Pardon your slave," said the manji presently, after delivering himself of a string of abuse at the sudden snapping of an oar hitherto used by the man at the stern as a rudder, "but if that accident had occurred two or three minutes ago in the current at the base of the hills we should all have been in the water."

"Lucky it didn't, then," responded Moody, glancing at Spencer, who had by previous arrangement maintained silence throughout ; "we should have had a scramble for our lives in that case."

"Friend of the poor, we might none of us have escaped, for 'tis well known that the god of the stream at that point is insatiable, and devours all

who tempt him," observed the man, speaking with calm conviction.

"And is he your god, my friend?" asked the Major, somewhat incautiously.

"Certainly," replied the manji, wondering evidently at the question, and eyeing first one and then the other of his passengers more closely than he had yet done ; "he is one of my gods, for have I not erected his shrine at Bundia, to which I bring offerings such as I can afford at the time appointed by the holy one who is in charge of it?"

"Quite right to keep him propitiated and in good humour," remarked Moody, gravely. "And now we are in smooth water we should soon reach the shore yonder."

"Not in such a hurry, noble sir," said the man, peering at the bank as if uncertain of the exact point for which he was making. "What did you tell your devoted servant was the place for which you are bound?"

Now on this point Moody had been studiously silent, and he found no difficulty in parrying the

question ; but this manji's suspicions were, he half feared, being excited, and, placed as they were in his power, he could not but feel some anxiety. On the other hand, once across the river and free to pursue their ride, there was no reason to fear for their safety or that of their enterprise.

"We are going towards the east" he promptly answered, just loosening his revolver in its case with one hand—an action not lost upon the watchful boatman, who instantly became even more lavish than ever in his epithets of respect.

"Incomparable lord!" exclaimed the man, "your devoted slave has made a mistake. Will your honour forgive him?"

"What do you mean? What mistake?" said the Major, all his suspicion aroused.

"Most noble one, you mentioned Mitti——"

"Scoundrel and deceiver!" cried Moody, now thoroughly on the alert. "I said we did not desire to go to Mitti, but to be landed on the other side as soon as possible."

"I am a miserable man to have thus stirred the

anger of the Chosen of Heaven!" exclaimed the wretch, as he jumped up and seized an oar with which to bring the boat speedily to shore.

They were now almost touching the bank, and Spencer was feeling for a rupee or two to pay their fare, when unfortunately his sleeve slipped back some distance above the wrist and displayed to view a perfectly white arm, which he had not thought it necessary to stain, as he had done his hands and face and neck. The light shining down revealed this to the observant manji, who, instantly taking alarm, vented his surprise in some inarticulate sounds which Moody interpreted to be an invocation to his god.

"Feringhi!" he muttered below his breath, still not allowing the boat to come to though the landing looked quite favourable. Then, addressing Spencer: "Protector of the poor, how is it that your honour's skin varies in colour, and that in one part you are pure white while in another you exhibit but the dusky hue of the people of Hindostan?"

"Villain and son of a dog!" cried the Major with a vehement rapidity which only just prevented the younger man, taken thus suddenly, from betraying himself by some words spoken in execrable Hindostani, "have I not told you my brother is dumb—that his tongue refuses to speak? and, with regard to his arm, he has long suffered from a leprous disease which has left certain parts of his body colourless and white—a common enough, occurrence, as you surely know."

An incredulous smile passed over the manji's sinister face. He said nothing for a few moments but his eyes seemed to gloat over the silver that shone in Spencer's palm, and if there was a doubt in his mind as to his conduct it was soon dissipated.

"What is it to me, illustrious one," he said, salaaming low, "whether your honours are sahibs or not? I am a poor man and your humble servant—command me as you will."

It is possible that Moody's attitude at this moment had some influence over the manji, for he

had drawn his pistol, and held it threateningly at the fellow's head, commanding him the while to land them without delay at the most convenient spot ; and, as a break in the bank where it shelved to the water immediately presented itself, they were soon out of the boat, and after jumping their horses over the gunwale, at liberty to pursue their journey to Ahtabad.

CHAPTER XII.

A RIDE FOR LIFE.

"Now, will that villianous manji, having taken from us four times our proper fare, allow us to depart in peace?" said the Major, wonderingly, after they had remounted and taken the bridle-path through the jungle in front of them, "or will he quietly drop down to Mitti and give the news of our passage of the river to the rebels?"

"I should not trust him for a moment," observed Spencer, looking over his shoulder as if anticipating pursuit. "I cannot tell you, Major, how annoyed I am to have been so incautious with my sleeve; but you see it's looser than usual and slipped up easily—far too easily."

"Of course, Spencer, it was entirely an accident," rejoined Moody, "which we must hope has done no harm. If only that confounded manji will keep quiet! But the chances are he will give information against us, and get a reward in that way. The villain! Perhaps I had better have shot him there and then, and so made sure of his silence."

The last words were spoken more to himself than to his companion, and indeed they were now riding at such a pace that conversation was difficult, while they both felt that the utmost vigilance and circumspection were necessary.

As they advanced, the bushes and jungle decreased in thickness, the hills on their right hand dwindled down into sandy undulations, and they began to hope that a clearer and more open road lay before them.

All on a sudden, as a dark object, which turned out to be a tope of mangoe trees, loomed in front, the words, "Who come dar?" shouted in a clear voice, startled them. Next instant a shot whistled by, causing them to pull up sharply, and

yet neither of the horsemen could discover the position of their enemy.

"Let us skirt the wood by the right," whispered Moody, "keeping well away from the main road which can't be far off in the other direction." And he rode cautiously round, maintaining a keen look-out, especially on the spot that seemed most favourable to an ambush. But it immediately became evident that the danger was not confined to the mangoe-tope or its close vicinity, for on both sides men's voices could be heard encouraging each other to seize the Englishmen, whom they apparently knew to be only two in number.

"Now, each for himself!" exclaimed the Major, as some half-dozen horsemen appeared barring the road right in front of them. "Dash through, Spencer, and if we are separated, meet me straight on as soon as may be, for that is our direction and we must stick to it."

So saying, and drawing his sword, he charged full at the troopers, one of whom, unable to stand against his headlong assault, went down to rise

no more, while a second fell before the impetuous onset of Walter Spencer. For a moment there was a rapid and sharp discharge of pistols at close quarters, and then the two Englishmen rode off at speed together, leaving far in their rear their astonished enemy, whose cries they could hear for a time but soon lost altogether, so that it seemed they really had shaken off their numerous assailants. Yet as they reached a less open tract the Major checked his horse, and then on a sudden came to an absolute halt.

"Spencer!" he cried, "we are through them now, but I can't longer conceal that I am badly hit, and, in fact, practically done for, I fear!"

"You don't say so, Major! I am grieved beyond measure; I had no idea of this!" exclaimed his companion, dreadfully shocked to perceive the wounded man's agony, now only too apparent.

"Yes, a pistol shot in the side—ah, 'tis too much! Spencer—take the despatch and ride on. Here——"

As he was feeling in his breast he fainted and

fell from his horse, but in a moment the young man was down by his side, supporting his head, loosening his belts, rubbing his hands, and speaking cheerful words to him. His efforts were rewarded, for presently the stricken officer revived and spoke again.

“Leave me now, Spencer—I am done for. Take this,” with trembling hands giving him the small roll that was so precious, “and bear it on to Ahtabad.”

“But I cannot desert you thus,” cried the young fellow in terrible distress, “and let you die in the jungle like a dog. No, no; do not ask me to do this!”

“As your superior officer I command you to hurry on and deliver the despatch at all hazards,” muttered Moody. “These villains——” There he stopped owing to a paroxysm of pain, but in a moment continued, “they are sure to pursue us, so ride on, ride on! But ah, Spencer, look well after Lilian. She loves you, Walter, she loves you. Yes, yes, better so, better so! Tell her, I

thought of her to the last ; I could not help loving her."

"Oh, my friend !" exclaimed Spencer, not more surprised than distressed at these utterances, "I will do all you ask if I ever see Lily again ; yes, I promise you that. But to leave you here thus, helpless, I cannot do it, and yet, and yet——"

"Surrender yourselves instantly !" cried several voices as if in chorus ; and Spencer found himself seized by strong arms and in a moment thrown on his back, while the bare blade of a tulwar was held perilously close at his throat ; yet his only thought at the moment was for Moody, whom the fellows now crowding round them in their ignorance were treating in the same rough fashion.

"Villains and sons of dogs !" he ejaculated, as he lay half-strangled and breathless at their mercy. "Know ye who it is ye are attacking, and that the Major-sahib is wounded to death ?"

"Be careful," said one in authority among them, as he sat quietly on his horse evidently taking

the command, "and bring the sahibs along with caution. The young one can ride, but first just deprive him of his sword and pistol, and tie a rope round his neck so that you can pull him up with a jerk should he prove restive. For the other, as he looks ill, four of you can carry him to the camp by slinging him on your pugarees between a couple of your lances ; it is not far, luckily."

Before many minutes had elapsed the mournful procession was on its way, and, following the orders of the leader, proceeding towards the top of mangoes which Moody a few minutes ago had so carefully avoided. Here, it turned out, was the encampment of a troop of the Lucknow Lancers, the men of which, having openly thrown off their allegiance and sworn to serve the Emperor at Delhi, were doing their best before presenting themselves to him at the Imperial city to win a reputation for zeal and devotion, by intercepting on the road close by as many of the Feringhis as possible, and giving them a short and bloody passage to the next world. There was under the

trees here a mud-hut, formerly used by a fakir, but now vacant, and into this miserable dwelling the two officers were thrust, without food or light or bedding, and with the intimation that in the morning they would be brought before the commander of the troop, who would not keep them long in suspense as to their fate.

“But you will let us have, at any rate, a little cold water!” exclaimed Spencer to the sergeant of the troop, as he was heartlessly giving his orders to the sentry instantly to cut down the sahib if he attempted to pass out. “See how the Major-sahib is praying for it, and he is wounded so that he cannot move.”

The man smiled pleasantly.

“He is but tasting beforehand a little of what, after the rising of to-morrow’s sun, will be his for evermore in the jehannum to which he and you will surely go,” said he. “Let him take his warning now, and prepare for the damnation which is his destiny!”

“Then you refuse this slight favour to a dying

man!" cried Spencer; "and yet you see the agony he suffers."

"Let him suffer torment!" laughed the fellow insolently. "I love to see you sons of pigs brought low; and, as for that unbeliever, let him die as all infidels deserve to die—suffering the agonies of those who are in hell!"

Sealing his cruel speech by that last mark of disrespect—spitting ostentatiously close to the prisoners—the ruffian left them, loudly repeating to the guard the stern orders he had previously given.

When Spencer turned to where his friend lay in the corner of the hut he found him in the last throes, insensibility having fortunately overcome him, and placed him beyond all bodily suffering. In vain the young officer gently strove to rouse him, if only for a moment, from this state; he seemed to be sinking rapidly, and, ere half-an-hour had elapsed, with a gentle sigh the brave spirit of James Moody passed for ever into the unseen world.

For some minutes the young fellow waited and watched, feeling with his hand on the heart of the dead man for any movement there might be ; but, perceiving nothing, and finding also that the breathing sounds had ceased, he knew all was over, and that he was now alone amongst his enemies. With deep grief and in silence Spencer covered the face that was so dear to him, not knowing, indeed, how soon it might be his turn to meet a fate like that of his friend, and, as he looked round and perceived the only opening in the wall of the miserable apartment to be the door guarded by the armed trooper, he felt that indeed his position was a hopeless one.

In the first place it was necessary to consider the safety of the despatch which had been entrusted to him, and which, fortunately, when stripped of his arms, he had so concealed as to preserve intact beneath his cummerbund. But, of course, when in a few hours he would have to meet his end, no despatch must be found on him, and to make sure of that he must swallow the little paper roll.

And yet, was no escape possible? Was he to give up his life without an effort, without a struggle?

The sentry passed the door, then repassed, then stood a moment, striving to penetrate the gloom of the hut. To his eyes all was darkness; to Spencer's accustomed vision, looking as he was from the depth of his miserable corner, all was light.

Instantaneously his resolve was taken. He gave a long, low whistle, and waited to see the effect. It was the manœuvre he had been taught by Moody to practise while shooting deer when on the move, in order to arrest their attention and cause them to hesitate; and the effect produced on the sentry was a similar one. Perplexed by the sound, he half turned his head, when Spencer sprang upon him, and seizing him fiercely by the throat, held him with one hand so that he could not utter a sound, while with the other he drew the fellow's dagger from his belt and plunged it deep into his heart. The whole action passed

within a few seconds, and with a faint gurgle the wretched man fell to the ground, where, after divesting him hastily of his sword and pistol, the young Englishman, drawing a deep breath of thankfulness, left him.

What next was he to do? That was Spencer's muttered question. At a short distance he could see the guard, stretched on the ground and sleeping soundly, for their discipline was loose now they had become to a great extent their own masters. It would be at least a couple of hours before the relieving sentry would appear, therefore, to make the most of this time was his grand object; and, fortunately, as he silently drew off towards the outskirts of the wood, Spencer came upon the horse of a superior officer, tethered close to the tent of his master. The saddle and all appurtenances lay close by, and within a minute or two he had, unnoticed by the slumbering syce, got the animal ready and ridden quietly off, unnoticed by a soul in the little camp.

All the world seemed asleep at that hour, and,

but for the eternal snarling and barking of the pariah dogs in the vicinity of the villages that lay in his way, he met with no obstacle during the space that elapsed before dawn ; and, even after the morning-star had disappeared in the brighter light that succeeded, his course was unvaried except now and again by the low salaam of the inevitable cowboy, or the little stream of women and girls passing to and from the well with their pitchers nicely poised upon their heads. On he rode, making steadily for the direction in which he knew Ahtabad to lie, but not following any definite track ; on, from one village to another by the footpaths and bridle-roads pointed out to him by those whom chance threw in his way, and who looked at him with wonder, and listened to his uncouth speech—for Hindostani was not his strong point—with astonishment ; on in the pleasant time just before sunrise, when all nature looked fresh in the cool air, and the leaves above shook in the gentle breeze ; on in the later hours, when the atmosphere was becoming warm and

oppressive, and the fierce rays beat down as if they must irresistibly scorch and shrivel up all moisture from the earth ; on in the shimmering heat of noontide, when the hot blasts blew fast and furious over the face of the country, raising clouds of fine dust that penetrated the very pores of the skin, and blinded the eyes, and caused the brain itself to reel.

At length, late in the afternoon, when the shadows once more began to give a grateful shade, though the hot wind was still blowing with hardly decreased strength, from a slight eminence in the plain Spencer caught sight of the mosques and minārs of the city of Ahtabad, and knew that his mission was all but accomplished.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BRAHMIN'S TEMPLE.

THAT which might truly be called a *gūlistān*, or garden of roses, extended from the city of Jahmere towards the river, and in the early weeks of spring made the whole air fragrant, and the surface of the ground as far as the eye could reach dazzling, with a splendour of colour not to be surpassed by the amaranths of Sumatra or the saffron-beds of Cashmere. Here and there this beautiful tract was relieved by small clumps of mangoe trees, which gave a welcome shade during the heats of the day, but the space was too precious to be used otherwise than for the main purpose of rose-growing, and in consequence the entire plain looked like one ex-

tended garden devoted to the cultivation of the fairest and sweetest of flowers, the uttah derived from which bore a renown almost equal to that of Persia. Through the centre of this region ran a road hardly larger than a footpath, leading to the high, rocky bank overhanging the river, and it was here principally that the trees were met with, while bordering the road was a low cactus-hedge, impervious except at one or two points where a passage had been cut through it.

It was the evening of the day when Ram Dyall and his fellows had suffered for their crimes, and when Moody and Spencer had started on their hazardous mission. The sun had set, the last glow of light had vanished from the horizon, and one by one the stars were appearing, only faintly and uncertainly as yet, when a tall figure, enshrouded in a long white dress, was seen rapidly crossing the rose-garden by the narrow way and making for the river-bank beyond. It would have been hard to say whether it were a man or woman who thus unerringly moved along, except that a slight

swinging of the figure betrayed the secret, and showed that the walk, notwithstanding a certain length of stride, belonged to the latter. But the woman was not alone, for just a step behind her came the well-known form of the bearer Bhagut, his handsome face wearing a dejected look, his brows contracted, his head sunk upon his breast.

"Will the holy man receive us to-night, or has he more serious work on hand?" asked the girl of her servant—for it was no other than Lilian Langford who spoke.

"Does he ever refuse to see my mistress," replied the man, "and is it likely he would do so at such a time as this?"

She was silent a few moments, for she knew what was passing through his mind.

"My poor Bhagut!" she murmured presently, in a compassionate tone. "Will the revered Brahmin have heard, do you think, of—of—the shame of this morning?"

"Will he have heard?" echoed the bearer; "will he have heard! What does he not hear? What

does he not know? And such a deed as this! Oh my brother—my noble Ram Dyall!”

There was a terrible sadness, an absolute despair in his voice.

They had come to the edge of a garden, where the table-land was broken by deep fissures into ravines, whose depths in the uncertain light appeared fathomless, and down whose precipitous sides no path could at first be seen.

“This way, Missy Lily; let me lead now, and help you down.” And passing in front of the girl Bhagut gave her his hand, and conducted her by a flight of steps, roughly hewn in the rock which here cropped up, to a point where a narrow track brought them on to a ledge commanding a fine view of the eddying stream, which glimmered far below at their feet. The broad-leaved sprays of a water-melon fell in masses over the cliff beside them, and here and there its dark green fruit could be discerned hanging temptingly down; but the bearer put these aside with a rapid movement of his hands, and disclosed an aperture of some size

into which he drew his young mistress without hesitation.

“There is no light here, but trust to me, Missy-sahib, for I know every inch of the cavern.”

“Not much better than I do, Bhagut,” she rejoined; “and yet to-night I feel strangely shy about coming here. Oh, that this interview were over; I dread it more than I can tell.”

The girl’s fears would not have been dissipated could she have seen the look her servant gave her, but he spoke reassuringly.

“Nay, Missy Lily understands the sacred father and how wise and beneficent he is. Let her trust to him, for he will never mislead her.”

“I know it, dear Bhagut, and yet—and yet—I fear greatly. Oh, I cannot, I dare not meet him.”

She sank down on the floor as she spoke, but a dim light was now seen within, and a deep voice reached them from the obscurity of the cave.

“Hah! my children, you are there! I have felt your presence close to me for some minutes; the

air has been full of it. Approach and receive my blessing. Rām ! rām !”

Hastily the bearer prostrated himself before the holy man, while Lilian, recovering from her confusion, joined in asking for his blessing and favour.

The sight that met their gaze was a strange one. A tall, gaunt figure, attenuated till the ribs stood out on each side, was surmounted by a head bound with a snow-white pugaree, and a face so marked on the forehead and between the eyes with coloured clay that it was difficult to form an idea of its natural expression. Round the loins was a cummerbund of the same material as the pugaree, while over the shoulders hung loosely a sheet which left the light-brown arms and legs entirely exposed. A powdering of ashes had apparently been given to the attenuated cheeks which did not diminish their ghastly look.

“This is a sad night, oh, father !” murmured Bhagut, in trembling tones.

“My son, fear not !” replied the Brahmin ;
“means will be found to counteract the evil that

these Christians have wrought to-day—aye, and that, too, perhaps by hands little suspected of them.”

What mean you, holy one?” asked the other, leading forward his young mistress into the interior of the cave. “What mean you by those words? Can you restore my brother that is dead? Can you join together his separated limbs?”

“I do not wonder at your bitterness, my poor Bhagut, nor marvel even if your faith in the gods is shaken by such terrible cruelty. But, see, we are nearing the temple of the holiest, and your mistress may not enter there.”

They had reached the door, cut in the solid rock, of a huge chamber whose roof was beautifully groined, while, at the top of the columns of lotus-leaves, which rose at intervals around, the heads of gigantic elephants stood out in bold relief and in life-like form, the proboscis and tusks of each projecting far from the cornice above. The god himself sat in the centre, his multiple arms spread out, his eyes gazing straight before him, his

legs crossed. Above him flickered a dim, uncertain light.

Lilian looked at the Brahmin imploringly.

"My father," she said, "am I never to be thought worthy of the notice of your gods? Am I never to be permitted to enter their presence, or to have a glimpse of their mysteries?"

The old man shook his head.

"None of the infidels are acceptable to the gods of the Brahmins, my child: that you must know full well. Only by strange methods, methods you would shudder to contemplate, could you, or such as you, be admitted to their altars."

"But if my dear mistress were willing to submit herself to your commands, what then, my father?" asked the bearer.

The Brahmin's eyes flashed from under his heavy brows.

"She little knows—even you yourself have but a faint idea of what would be required of her. 'Tis well-nigh an impossibility."

"Nothing in this world is impossible," said

Bhagut, sententiously, while Lilian, standing there at the threshold, was experiencing the strangest sensations as she caught an indistinct view of the wonderful carvings, the mystic designs, the huge heads within, and of the unearthly figure of the god which presided over all. What was it that rose in her breast, stirring her deepest emotions as she gazed? What new fascination had seized her, holding her fast in its meshes?

The old Brahmin regarded her intently, and made a secret sign to Bhagut.

"Her mother's blood is asserting itself," whispered he, significantly, "and the longing for the ancient faith is taking possession of her. Now is the time for our purpose—delay may be fatal."

Each of the men took a hand and conducted the young girl towards the centre of the temple, at which point the priest, leaving her, advanced close to the feet of the god, where for a short space he was occupied in some jādoo, the result of which magic influence was that a thin smoke presently rose and enveloped the figure in such a manner as

to render it indistinct and shadowy to the eyes of the onlookers.

And now a startling thing occurred. While a loud and discordant beating of drums and clashing of cymbals suddenly broke the silence which had prevailed, one of the many arms of the god appeared to be slowly raised, and, pointing at the half-fainting girl, to distinctly beckon her forward. Then all was suddenly still again.

"See!" exclaimed the excited Bhagut, supporting his charge carefully with one hand, while with the other he did obeisance with repeated and deep salaams; "see, Missy, the god accepts your service, and is propitious. How wonderfully fortunate you are to be thus taken into his favour."

"On one condition only," a low voice was heard to murmur, as if proceeding from the mysterious being itself—"that the injunctions of my beloved Brahmin are followed to the letter, without question and without hesitation."

"Missy Lily, you hear that. The reverend father must be implicitly obeyed in all things."

"Otherwise," continued the voice, "vengeance!—a horrible vengeance!—will be taken. A living and a breathing sacrifice will be the least punishment in this world ! and, hereafter——"

But such a crash of sound here ensued that even Bhagut, accustomed as he was to the strange ceremonies of the place, fell back amazed and appalled. It was time for him to look to his charge. Her senses had almost left her, and she rested on his arm, her fair face turned upwards, her hair loosened, her eyelids closed, till on a sudden, roused by the din, she awoke from her trance, which had indeed been of short duration, and, glancing up at the god, sought with straining gaze to penetrate the character and meaning of those fixed and mysterious features. To her eyes, in the condition of exaltation to which she had attained, there was a slight relaxation in the god's expression, a faint movement of the stony lips.

"Ah!" she cried in a tone of frenzy, "I am not considered so utterly an outcast as I had feared; there is yet hope from the gods of my ancestors

that I may attain to the holy state in which I would be."

"The condition—the only possible condition—has been named," spoke in hollow tones the voice that had been heard before. "Absolute obedience to the injunctions of the holy father from the penitent devotee, who may find it hard to give the one great sign of her abandonment that alone can ensure success and happiness."

"And, if I agree, will the commands laid upon me be such as I can obey?" she asked, in an anxious tone.

"Has the reverend one ever been too exacting from his servants—is he not ever a kind master?" answered the voice in a persuasive tone.

"Nay," she replied, "he has always been good to me. Oh! I will trust him and obey him to the uttermost; never shall he have cause to complain of me—never."

For the third time the unearthly music broke forth in a clangour that far surpassed the previous outbursts, and the very roof of the temple seemed

to vibrate with the din. Lilian, exhausted with the excitement through which she had passed, was now led by Bhagut back to the entrance-passage, where in the fresher air she revived, and where they were presently joined by the old Brahmin.

"My daughter," he said, in a kindly tone, "your desires, rash though they be, may come about in the end ; far be it from me to check them, but I would again warn you that the sacrifice required may be a great one."

"How should I know, oh, father, to what sacrifice you refer—how can I tell what your mystic meaning is ?" asked she, wonderingly.

He glanced significantly at Bhagut before he replied.

"The god has spoken, the conditions have been named. Is it not so ?" he demanded, fixing his eyes steadfastly on her.

The unfortunate girl shrank under his gaze.

"Yes," she answered, dreamily, "I know all that. It is too late to go back now—too late!—too late!"

"Search the inward heart, know well the inward

mind," said the old man, gravely. "Decide not in haste to repent in bitterness and in sorrow."

"Whence comes this eternal longing, this pent-up desire, oh, holy one, to know more of the Brahmin faith, to enter more deeply into its inner life than has yet been vouchsafed to me? There is a strange attraction draws me on; oh, bear with me, and satisfy me, for has not the god accepted my poor service?"

"It seems that so Fate wills it, my child, and I am but the interpreter of the all-powerful god's designs. Listen, then, to what I have to relate. Those whom the Brahmins hold in the deepest reverence, whom they have worshipped from the earliest time, are to be degraded and cast down, and the Brahmins themselves are to be polluted and made unclean, by the very authority which should protect and foster them; of so much there are already the plainest proofs."

"I have heard something of this," interrupted the unfortunate Lilian, "but is it possible there is any truth in it?"

"My child," returned the old priest, warmly, "it has been foretold these many months past, and already our brothers in the army are suffering cruel things because they will not disgrace themselves and their religion by this pollution which is being forced upon them."

"Some I know have died cruel deaths," whispered she, looking aside at Bhagut, who, wrapped apparently in sad meditation, sat immoveable just behind her. "You have heard of the terrible executions of this morning? but then you are aware also of the reasons for them."

"All has been reported to me; everything has been told me. Can you wonder at the horror and the anger that I feel?" murmured he. "Do you think the gods of the Brahmins will not take a terrible vengeance on the oppressors—that they will not punish the murderers of the holy Brahmins?"

"I know not how that may be," said the poor girl, bewildered at the turn matters were taking. "It is sad that Ram Dyall and the others should

have been so treated, but they had a fair trial and even those who condemned them did so with regret."

"I see," cried the Brahmin, "how useless it is to expect even you, my daughter, with all your desires and longings for better things, to cast aside your prejudices and to throw yourself unreservedly into the great cause for which I had hoped to prepare you. No, 'tis not to be—'tis not to be."

"Ah! say not that—speak not so, oh, holy one. Did you not bear to me messages from my loved mother, whose dear name I cherish—messages which command my obedience, and which I should love to obey if only I saw the way clear before me?" cried she, in deep distress.

"Have the gods of the Brahmins, the gods whom your mother worshipped, spoken then in vain? Are all the promises but now made in the temple to be as naught? Have they been uttered only to be broken?" demanded the old man, frowning angrily.

"Nay, nay," said she, bowing her head before

him, "I will be obedient in all things that are possible. What more can be expected from me?"

The Brahmin's eyes glittered in the dim light, for he saw he was gaining his object, and that her resistance was now of the feeblest.

"My own daughter, all that I, who am but a servant of the god, shall ever require of you is within your power, but your will is what is necessary. Give that, and you give all."

"Then it is yours, and yours alone, my father. I place it in your hands, for were you not always my own mother's best counsellor, and where now can I look for better advice than to the source from which she sought it?"

Bhagut arose quickly, and made for the door of the cave.

"'Tis well, my child," said the old man, "well for you and the great cause that you have so decided. Remain ever steadfast, and blessings shall attend you ; fail or flinch from the task and it does not lie with me to say what may be the issue."

"You frighten me, even now!" cried the unfortunate girl, "and I know not what to think. Have I gone too far—have I promised too much?"

"Trust me, my child. Can you not do that without reserve."

She appeared to consider for a moment.

"You spoke of 'the great cause'," she said; "what is that?"

The Brahmin started at the question, as if unprepared with his reply.

"Not now can I explain it," he answered, hurriedly; "the hour is late, and a few minutes would not suffice for the purpose; therefore my daughter must have patience and wait. She has made a high resolve to-night; let her be obedient to the command that shall be laid upon her, and all will be well."

Lilian perceived by his tone that nothing more could be gained from him; indeed, it was evident that a fit of abstraction even now possessed him, and that his mind was wandering into some other region than that around him.

"Farewell, then, my father!" she said, bending low before him; "I shall be ready when you call upon me, for my faith in you is boundless."

A faint smile overspread his face, but no word passed his lips, and the girl left him standing there motionless, and next moment had joined Bhagut, who led the way by the flight of steps and the road through the rose-garden, with which they had of late become so familiar, to where her palki waited ready to bear her home.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE HOUSE IN THE CITY.

THE city of Jahmere consisted of a conglomeration of streets as gloomy and tortuous, and was built up of houses as lofty and windowless, as any to be found in Upper India. Here and there a balcony or outside gallery might be seen to relieve the general monotony of outline, but, considering the number of years that had passed since the city had ceased to be a frontier town, it seemed curious that its character remained so unchanged from what it had been in the old days when invasion and rapine were carried up to its very walls and into its spacious market-place, and when every man's house was literally his castle, to be defended

to the last against any foes that might attack it were they the wild hordes of Mahmoud of Ghuzni, the devastating Mahrattas of the Deccan, or the more disciplined forces of Akbar or of Aurungzebe.

It was from no external enemy now, however, that danger threatened the peace of the city. The tide of war had for scores of years left it untouched and undisturbed ; its commerce had prospered, its market had become renowned, its trade in the beautiful gold and silver work, for which it was celebrated, had quadrupled ; nothing, indeed, seemed wanting to enhance its position among the traditionally celebrated cities of the East. The close vicinity of the large cantonment of troops gave it a certain distinction over neighbouring towns, and no stranger would have deemed a tour in India complete without visiting the vast rock-cut temples and holy shrines which formed so wonderful and striking a contrast to the cramped and intricate turns and passages of the place itself.

In a large room of one of the better houses of

the city were assembled, on the evening succeeding Lilian's visit to the mysterious temple, a number of men of various aspect and age—high-caste Brahmins from Oude, Mahomedans from the Punjab, fair-skinned Poorbeahs, and sturdy Jāts, all bent apparently on some common object. They had entered singly, after giving to the durwān at the entrance a sign known only to themselves and to him, and, while talking in low tones to each other, appeared to wait anxiously the coming of some person of importance.

At the upper end of the apartment a stout, yet very handsome, man, by name Jemadar Roop Narain, with aquiline features and an upright military carriage, wearing the ordinary white dhōti and jacket of a sepoy, in response to a general call from those nearest him, presently stood forward and addressed the assembly.

“Brothers!” he said, “we are met to-night for reasons which I need not detail to you, to consult together on the crisis which has arisen. You know the sad events that have happened, you know how

the oppressors have put their foot upon our necks, how they have butchered our comrades, how they may perchance seize next some of us who are here to-night. In that case you can guess what will happen."

A murmur of assent ran through the meeting.

"And why," he continued, "could not things have been let alone? Not content with deposing the king of my country, for which I could hardly blame them, as he was but a bad governor, the authorities are now uprooting all the settlement of the land, and the great Maun Singh, formerly one of the richest nobles of Oude, is, I hear, a beggar."

"Wah! wah! Is this true?" exclaimed two or three, excitedly.

"I speak truth, and nothing but truth, my brothers; rely on me for that," continued the Jemadar. "When, I would ask, is all this to end? I live on the bank of the beautiful Surjoo, where for generations my fathers have cultivated their land, unmolested and in peace. I look to return in my old age to the well-loved spot, to end my days

there when I shall have earned my pension and retired from the army. But, if my land is taken from me, what then will become of me and my sons? ”

“ What, indeed ! ” was echoed round.

“ Already, I am told, notices have been served, and it is necessary that I should appear in the court to defend my property ; yet, when I ask for leave to go to Lucknow to instruct the vakeel, the Colonel-sahib tells me I cannot have it, and that, if I am a true man, I must in these times of danger stick to my duty, and help to keep the regiment straight.”

“ He is a budmash. Down with him ! ” called out some of the younger men.

“ No, my friends and brothers, the Colonel-sahib is not a bad man ; on the contrary, he has always been good to me and to many of us. Is it not so? ”

“ Hah ! hah ! It is so,” assented a few.

“ But he is not permitted now to be the father of his men, as he used to be. He, too, has to obey

orders and is bound by regulations, as he has himself told me, and it is not in his power to do as he would like in these matters. Meantime, I shall lose my estate, and all my dear ones will be turned adrift. Is this to be borne in silence?"

"Never! never!" was shouted on every hand.

"Then how is it to be prevented, oh, brothers—can you answer me that?"

"Down with the sahib-logue! Let them die! let them die!" cried a number round him.

Roop Narain shook his head sorrowfully.

"No, no," he said, "I have served for twenty years, and have fought with them in many campaigns, and I, for one, will never consent to murder my masters. Far be that from me."

"Then stand aside and let me speak!" exclaimed an elderly man, with a flowing grey beard, pushing forward and holding up his hand; "let them hear me before they decide."

"Shabāsh, Mahomed Buksh, shabāsh!" were the cries which greeted this new orator, who in fact

held only the low rank of sergeant in the Lucknow Lancers.

“Can you have forgotten the shameful death of our beloved Russaldar this morning?” he shouted; “and do you not know he was murdered because of the evidence that Slingsby-sahib gave against him at the court-martial?”

This question was received in silence by the assembly, because in truth none present were aware of what had passed during the trial.

“This I know for certain,” continued the man; “and it is not the first time that Slingsby-sahib has done harm. Who was it but he that induced the Colonel-sahib to reduce me to the ranks when I was a native officer—do I not owe him a bad turn for that?”

“Wah! wah!” cried several near him, laughing and jeering, half drunk apparently with bhang and excitement.

“Are we then to be so tender-hearted towards those who have injured us?” asked Mahomed Buksh, warming to his task and glaring fiercely

round him. "Now that our victory is at hand, I for one say we must make the most of it, girding up our loins and slaying right and left, and sparing not—no, nor man nor woman nor child, of all the infidels."

"Shabāsh! Shabāsh!" was shouted on every hand, for it was evident the harangue of the discontented sergeant hit the general taste much better than the more moderate address that had preceded it.

"To hell, then, I say, with our enemies!" continued he. "Cut them off, root and branch. Spare not one to pollute the earth. So shall we be left masters, and, when our own Emperor reigns at Delhi, shall be all officers, and rich and noble gentlemen."

Again a chorus of assent arose, and it seemed as if the loquacious sergeant would have succeeded in rousing his audience to even greater enthusiasm, but at that moment an interruption took place, caused by the entrance of a couple of more important personages, who turned out to be no other

than the Mahomedan officer, Secunder Khan, looking, indeed, as handsome and bearing himself with as gallant an air as ever, but somewhat warm and out of breath, and with him a young man who was an entire stranger to the assembled company. All waited with looks bent on the native officer, who, after resting for a minute, began his speech.

“Brothers!” he said, “whether Mahomedans or Hindoos, I am sorry to be late for our meeting, but you will, I am sure, forgive me when I tell you where I have been and what work I have had in hand. ’Tis a place well known to our Hindoo brethren, a holy spot, that I have been visiting and a venerable man with whom I have been conferring—the Brahmin of the temple by the river.”

“Shabāsh! Shabāsh, sahib!” was shouted round him, as he paused a moment to take breath.

“Yes,” he continued, “the holy priest is all with us, my friends, and he has powerful instruments at his command, and can do great things; but you,

also, must be prepared to do your part. Government has taken away our rights and privileges, and now is not that which is dearer, far dearer to us than aught else, at stake? Is not our holy religion threatened by the nauseous cartridges, greased with pigs' and cows' fat, we are being forced by our infidel oppressors to bite, and by the flour mixed with bone-dust we are given to eat? and are we not bound by all we most value in this world to throw off the vile yoke that entails such pollution upon us?"

"Hah! hah! but he speaks truth," was the general cry.

"I tell you," he went on, "the principal men, the leaders among our enemies, will be cut off—I need not now say in what manner. True, one insignificant attempt has failed—failed, perhaps, because the instruments were not chosen ones of Allah. But peace be with them! They have paid the penalty with their lives, and I will not judge Ram Dyall and his nephews, whose wicked execution we have seen to-day."

There he paused to mark the effect of his words, but though a few, like the Jemadar Roop Narain, might take exception to them, it was evident they commanded the assent of the great majority of his hearers.

“Now, when the leading men, both military and civilians, have been removed from our path at one swoop while eating and drinking together in fancied security, what can be easier than to dispose of the remainder? For who is it that really possess the power—these Europeans who can be counted by the hundred, or you, my brothers, who number hundreds of thousands?”

He asked this, speaking loudly and looking the eager crowd boldly in the face.

“Shabāsh, sahib, shabāsh!” they echoed with one voice. “To hell with the Europeans!”

“On a certain evening, at the sahib-logue’s dinner-hour—for that is the time, I tell you, at which the blow will first fall—you must be ready to rush the guns,” he continued, lowering his voice to a stage whisper that impressed them deeply.

"The night will be dark, yet a few of the foremost may fall—fall in a holy and just cause, and, therefore, be translated into the heaven of heavens. Do you dread that, my friends and brothers? Will you not sacrifice so much for your religion and for all you hold dear?"

"We will! we will!" they shouted, their eyes glaring, their teeth flashing.

"The chiefs dead, the guns in our possession, what can prevent our final victory—what can stand between us and the rewards we shall have earned? The whole of Jahmere will be at our feet; the fair and helpless mem-sahibs, whose husbands will lie dead round the dinner-table and whose children will be in our hands; the Treasury, with its hundreds of lakhs; the houses of the station and cantonment, with all their beautiful contents; the city, with its squares and streets of shops and its rich merchants, who may be tortured and squeezed to your hearts' content—all this and much more will be yours, rightly yours, to take or to leave as you choose; for will it not be the loot

that has fallen to your bow and to your spear in this most holy of wars?"

Again, for an instant, he ceased speaking, and looked confidently round at the eager faces of the crowd, whose applause was loud and apparently unanimous.

"Now I have said to you nearly all that is necessary at present," he went on more slowly. "Yet one point remains. You know of the State of Lodhpore, which is close by here, and you will remember that the Begum, whom Allah has taken to paradise, left great riches behind her. Now these riches, together with her lands and estates, have been seized by an intruder who has no right to them, and this villain has brought up an English lawyer, named Delmar, to defend his abominable cause. He permits the sahib-logue to shoot over the roons he has usurped, he entertains them at nautches and dinners, hoping in that way to corrupt the judges and induce them to decide the case in his favour. Will you allow this? Will you not rather, when the day of your triumph

comes, depose this dishonest usurper, and cut off his head, and the head of the English vakeel Delmar, who will then be in your power?"

"Wah! wah! That we will," they shouted in loud tones. "None of the impious English or their friends shall be spared—no, not one."

"That is well," he said, with a satisfied smile. "Now it only remains for me to present to you my friend, the rightful heir to the guddi of Lodhpore. He has accompanied me here to-night, and is charged with a message of the deepest interest to you, which he will deliver with his own lips. This is the Nawab of Lodhpore. Hear him with the same attention as you have given to me, and it will be well, and the Prophet will reward you!"

So saying, he took by the hand the youth who had been sitting silently beside him, while those nearest made respectful salaams and enquiries for his Highness's health. The boy, for he was little more, received these marks of favour with perfect case, having evidently been trained to play his part in a good school; and when, the next

moment, he addressed the meeting, he spoke with calmness and decision.

“Soldiers and fellow-countrymen!” he said
“My friend, Secunder Khan, has explained to you one reason of my meeting you all here to-night; in common with you I suffer from the oppression of the Feringhis, and long to be free from it. Are we not all men, and bound to defend our rights? and is not one of those rights—for Hindoos as well as Mahomedans—that which enables us to practise our religion unmolested?”

“That is our right!” they cried. “Down with those who oppose it.”

“Now,” continued the youth, “I have just come from one who, if you will fight for him, promises you complete freedom not only in this, but in all other respects; and he is not, like these accursed infidels, a man of yesterday, but one of distinguished dignity, of highest honour, of noblest descent; he is, indeed, your rightful sovereign, as you will with one voice acknowledge when I tell you his name—Bahadoor Shah, Emperor of Delhi!”

“Shabāsh ! Shabāsh ! Nawab-sahib !” came from every throat.

“Yes !” exclaimed the pretended Prince, “I am charged by his Majesty—may his shadow never be less !—with this gracious message to you, and he invites you, when you have made short work of these detestable barbarians here, to come to his Imperial city, the capital of the world, and if need be to fight for him and his ancient dynasty, and to receive the happiness reserved for you in this world and the next.”

“Wah ! wah !” shouted his hearers, as these gracious promises fell upon their ears. “But this man speaks wonders indeed.”

“From every station, from every city, the persecutors are being driven out ; and will you be backward in the good work ? Will you not earn your reward by smiting them and exterminating them from the earth ? Allah has given them into your hand. Will you reject his gift ?”

Again his stirring words drew forth their warmest plaudits.

“My friends!” he continued, his voice gathering strength as he perceived the manner in which he was moving them; “I seek not for myself riches, or honours, or dominion. No, I have come fresh from the Imperial presence to conjure you in the Emperor’s name and in the name of Religion, to cast aside the infidel yoke, to sweep from the earth all who oppose the holy cause, to lead you in triumph to the marble halls of the royal palace, to the very Dewān-Khass itself! But you know I am the true Nawab of Lodhpore, for has not my lord the Emperor personally confirmed to me my rights?”

“Hah! hah! Nawab-sahib!” they loudly assented, led in chorus by the wary Secunder Khan, who was delighted at the success of the oratory of his young friend.

“And if, among the disbelievers, you should come upon Delmar-sahib, or any of the faction of the usurpers of the guddi which is rightfully mine—well, ’tis not for me to say you ‘Nay,’ is it now?” asked he, smiling calmly and showing his perfect teeth

“Wah! wah!” they shrieked, in a storm of delight. “We shall remember Delmar-sahib, and we know him well, for he is a friend of Colonel Scott-sahib, and is often at his bungalow.”

“Now I have spoken to you all that my master, whom may Allah preserve, charged me with. I have been faithful to my trust. It is for you, my friends and brothers, to be true to yours, to take up the holy cause, to join the hosts of the faithful, to seek in the great city, and at the foot of the Imperial throne, the rewards which shall surely be yours. In the name of Religion, then, and for the honour of your Emperor, I command you to go forth with fire and the sword! Spare not the heathen and the infidels! Slay all them that are against the Imperial dynasty, and the rulers whom it has set up. Fight like lions, and the Garden of Paradise, the abode of everlasting peace, shall be your portion for evermore!”

As the young fellow resumed his seat loud applause greeted him on every side.

“Deen! Deen!” cried the most fanatical of his

auditors. "To hell with the unbelievers—let them die the death of the unrighteous!"

But the din ceased when Secunder Khan, raising his hand, spoke to the excited soldiers a few parting words.

"Brothers! hear me a moment," he said. "You know what is expected from you, and under whose high commands you will act. No carelessness, remember, no undue talking, but secrecy—absolute secrecy—till the moment comes to strike. Then, no hesitation, no drawing back from the good work, no showing of pity or of mercy for those that have been delivered over to you; for their sacrifice will be grateful to Allah, and to his Prophet, whose name is Peace."

With these words the assemblage broke up, the members, at Secunder Khan's suggestion, departing gradually by ones and twos so as to obviate all suspicion, while the so-called Nawab passed quietly out, accompanied only as far as the threshold by his crafty Mahomedan friend.

CHAPTER XV.

SEASONING FOR A CURRY.

"ALL the guests are coming to dinner, then, Lily?" said Colonel Scott to his niece, "and you will give us your celebrated curry?"

"Of course, uncle dear," she replied, "and I think the party will be as large as usual, for the Commissioner and other principal civilians have accepted, as well as the General and all the senior officers."

"Well, I look to you to do the thing in first-rate style, for in these troublous times one can't tell how many more such feasts we may be spared for, so 'tis as well to enjoy them while we may."

He said this with a very significant smile.

"Now, don't pray speak so!" cried Lilian, look-

ing round as if in terror ; “ my nerves seem so shattered by all this anxiety, I cannot bear to think of what might happen.”

“ My poor child ! ” exclaimed the Colonel, “ perhaps we had best put off the party altogether ; there is sufficient excuse to do so, I’m sure.”

“ Oh, no, uncle,” answered she, quickly ; “ everyone knows, the natives as well as others, this custom of yours of giving an annual dinner on your birthday, and the effect of foregoing it at this time might be bad.”

“ Sensibly spoken ! ” cried the Colonel, delighted to hear Lilian’s views, agreeing as they did so completely with his own. “ That, dear girl, is exactly my own opinion—that we are bound to make the best of things, and then trust in Providence. I shall take care to have due precautions taken in the way of special guards round the house that night, and the Commissioner and General will both have their escorts.”

“ Yes,” said Lilian, with a doubtful look ; “ I suppose so.”

"Suppose so ! Of course—of course," muttered the Colonel, impatiently. "What does the girl mean ?"

"Well," she murmured, under her breath, "it would be hard to say, for indeed I cannot explain it myself ; and yet there is a presentiment that haunts me."

"Nonsense, child, nonsense !" interrupted the Colonel, with decision ; "you must not give way to presentiments. Why, we shall have you consulting the astrologers next, or going to some old fortune-teller, or priest, to hear——"

"Don't, uncle, pray don't," cried the girl, pressing her heart and turning suddenly pale ; "you have no idea how easily I am upset now, though it seems so absurd."

"God bless the child ! What possesses her ?" he said, looking at his niece with astonishment.

But Lilian, unable to bear the strain, even as he spoke passed into her room, and soon afterwards her uncle went out to the mess-house to dinner, it being the guest-night there.

An hour later, as the Brahmin of the temple sat absorbed in contemplation near the shrine which he served, his head freshly covered with dust, and the elf-locks which framed his ghastly face hanging down in a wilder tangle than usual, he became aware of the presence of the devoted Bhagut, who announced his mistress's approach.

"I am ready for her," he said. "Oh, Bhagut," rousing himself from his abstraction in an instant, "if she is prepared to do her part 'tis well, if not, she will fall a sacrifice; I have sworn it before the god, and escape is impossible."

The bearer salaamed to the earth, but spoke not.

"Now let her come to me—the time is ripe."

Retreating for a moment, Bhagut presently returned with Lilian, who stood silent before the Brahmin.

"My child," he said, "the hour is propitious for your great sacrifice, and all things promise well. You have considered, I trust, the declaration you made when last here, and are prepared to abide by it?"

"I trust in you, oh, father, absolutely," she answered, in a low voice.

Bhagut drew back at these words, leaving her alone with the Brahmin.

"'Tis as I hoped," murmured the latter, while gradually, as before, a thin film of smoke arose, enveloping the figure of the god in its fumes and giving to it a marvellous aspect of life and motion.

"I speak but as the servant of the god," began the Brahmin, "and in what I say you will recognise his utterance only."

"That I acknowledge," she replied, "for that is why I submit myself body and soul to you, oh, holy one."

"The god has been grieved that those who are his most devoted worshippers have been cruelly persecuted, and are now being given over to vile contamination by the Feringhis. Of this you are well aware?"

Lilian only bowed in response to these words.

"He favours the movement that is to set them

free—the great and holy cause to which you, my beloved daughter, have bound yourself.”

The miserable girl started, in dread as it seemed of what was to follow ; but the wily priest gave her no time, and hurried on.

“ Your will is mine, you know, and mine is the god’s ; and he bids you help as I shall direct. Is it not so, my child ? Have you not received this command from the god himself ? ” asked he.

“ Yes, father, that is true,” she acknowledged.

“ And you know the consequences of disobedience—the ruin that will ensue both to your body and mind—for has not the god spoken of them ? ” he continued.

“ Truly he has, oh, reverend one ! ” she said, looking up with awe at the majestic figure above sitting shrouded in the smoke which still rose in clouds around it.

“ Know, then, my daughter, he whom you are regarding with the reverence due to him has for untold centuries presided over an ancient religious society, embracing some of the highest and most

irreproachable persons in the land ; he is their director and their god, and his commands they delight to obey."

Lilian followed his words with the deepest attention, while still gazing up at the figure above her.

"But, though many are of the supremest rank, those of lowly station are not despised ; only entire devotion on the part of the members is necessary, and all the rest follows."

"I understand," she murmured, hanging anxiously on his lips.

"This sacred society, ramifying as it does through every grade in the country, permeating families where its existence would never be suspected, is secret as the grave—secret in its organisation, secret in its signs, secret in its language."

"Yes," she muttered, wondering what was to come next.

"I say secret in its language," he continued, "for it possesses a mystic language of its own—a language spoken by all its members, and by which they alone can recognise each other."

"How wonderful!" she exclaimed; "and to think I should never have heard of this holy society!"

"My daughter, listen. I have more to tell. The language, the signs, the organisation are all hidden—hidden from the public eye; nay, their operation is also hidden and secret, yet their effects are open enough—open, indeed, to every eye."

"Extraordinary!" whispered the girl, drawing a long breath.

"Yes," went on the Brahmin; "and what will you say when I announce to you that this sacred and secret society, this mystic company of the best and the holiest in the land, now looks to a humble instrument to put forth its power, to make evident its all-pervading strength—and that that instrument is *yourself*!"

As he spoke his eyes flashed, and he pointed with his long lean finger to the god, whose arm now again distinctly moved, signing, as it seemed, to Lilian to come within its reach. Silently the girl kept her eyes fixed on that wondrous sight

while a mysterious shudder passed over her that she strove in vain to restrain.

"If I am worthy," at length she murmured, "to be chosen thus, how can I hesitate? I have given myself to you, my father—how can I withdraw?"

"Rightly spoken, my child," rejoined the priest; "the god has accepted your service, and the holy society accepts it also."

"Am I to be received into it?" she asked, simply, thinking that that was an easy matter.

"Nay, nay!" replied he. "Not so fast, not so fast as that. The society requires a proof that you will use its powers—the terrible powers it will confer upon you—in the only manner of which it approves."

"How am I to understand that?" she exclaimed.

"Thus, my daughter," he replied, fixing a steadfast gaze upon her. "There is to be a dinner at your uncle's, at which all the great Feringhis are to be assembled; you know this, and you are aware of the day that has been appointed?"

"Yes," she said, "of course I am aware of it."

"The society has decreed that certain of these Feringhis are to die, and the god approves the decision."

Lilian put her hand before her eyes, for a terrible fear of a coming evil dawned upon her.

"To die!" she exclaimed. "How to die?"

"They have deserved death a hundred times by their murder of Ram Dyll, the Brahmin, the holy martyr—one who was a leader in the sacred society and a faithful adherent of its god."

He waited a moment to see the effect of his words, then hastened on.

"The manner in which the society acts is rapid, and those whom it removes suffer little, for the medicine used is a powerful and a subtle one."

"Medicine!" exclaimed Lilian, throwing down her hands and staring wildly at the Brahmin, "medicine, do you say?"

"My child, I call it so; it is so spoken of among the members of our holy society," he replied, eyeing her attentively.

"But you speak of it as acting rapidly and causing little suffering," she said, with suspicion. "What do you mean—what is this medicine you indicate?"

"Ah, my daughter, I cannot give its name," he answered evasively; "enough for you to know that the small phial which I shall entrust to you as the chosen instrument of the sacred society will effect its purpose, and, when that is done, all the mysterious longings of your nature, all your desires to enter more fully into your dead mother's holy state, and to be in full communion with her soul, will be satisfied. You, like her, will then be enrolled among the chosen ones, and received into paradise by the god."

But Lilian was not to be so put off.

"I do not understand," she began, "what is expected from me with regard to this medicine. What am I to do with the phial you refer to?"

"You, my child," said the Brahmin, "are to be commissioned with the making of the curry for the

party at your uncle's; for is the dish not called after your name?"

"Yes," she replied, "that is true; I always make the curry."

"You will," continued her instructor, looking calmly at her as with a profound salaam he took from the very altar of the god a small round glittering bottle, which he handled with the utmost reverence, "carefully mix with it the contents of this sacred phial, and you will do this unseen and unknown by any person. Do you fully comprehend my meaning?"

The unhappy girl gazed half in wonder, half in awe, as he raised before her the mysterious vessel, which she perceived was carefully closed.

"Is it from the god?" she asked at last, in a trembling voice.

"Directly from the god himself," answered the Brahmin, without hesitation, "and with his blessing fresh upon it."

There was a pause, which Lilian broke.

"But you spoke of dying—that the Feringhis

are to die!" she said ; "and now you tell me I am to mix this medicine with the curry ! Oh, father, what is it you mean? Why do you deal in such mystery?"

" My child, you have sworn to trust me, though warned that the conditions must be hard, that the sacrifice on your part may be almost more than you can conceive possible. Is it not so?" he asked, glaring at her from under his shaggy brows.

" It is so," she replied, frightened by his savage look ; " it is so indeed ! "

" And, lucky girl ! " continued he, softening into a smile, " have you not been specially favoured, inasmuch as the god, in his goodness, has entrusted to you the task I am imposing on you, and placed in your hand the precious means wherewith to carry it out? "

Speaking so he gave her the mysterious phial, which she saw was of beautiful silver filigree work, with innumerable glistening facets scattered over its surface.

" The god has been very kind," she murmured

overcome by sensations it were difficult to define ; “ and — yet — I cannot—I dare not—promise ! ”

“ Not promise ! ” hissed the foul Brahmin in her ear ; “ not promise, after you have given yourself over absolutely to the service of the god, have lost your personality in his, and have taken into your possession at once the holiest symbol and the most sacred instrument of his will that it is possible for him, in his gracious favour, to bestow ! ”

As he pierced the trembling girl with his blood-shot eyes she cowered beneath his gaze, and all but fainted where she stood. But there was none there to help her ; she was alone with the Brahmin and the god.

“ I think I shall go mad ! ” she said, presently, under her breath.

The Brahmin laughed aside at her distress.

“ I am to mix this—this—medicine in the curry ; and they are to eat—and to die ! ”

“ They will not all eat,” he said, cynically. “ Those whom the god would preserve will not eat. Having

done your work, my daughter, leave the issue with the god ; he will be satisfied, you may be certain, with it and with you."

" And is this—this thing that you ask me to do—the only possible means of satisfying the gods whom I so long to please—the sole way open to me of gaining the happiness I sigh for, the certainty of the bliss of seeing my loved mother again ? "

As she asked this question in a tone of deepest despair the Brahmin looked down triumphantly at her, for his victory seemed close at hand.

" 'Tis indeed as you say, my child," he answered, " the only way to secure your desires, to propitiate the god and to enter through him into the hope of meeting your lost mother. But there is a further consideration. A terrible peril threatens one to whom you have given your heart—nay, start not when I tell you this—for is there aught, think you, that escapes my knowledge or that of the god ? "

The wonder painted in the wretched Lilian's face was her silent reply to this question.

“ He whom you love, the young Spencer-sahib, has gone on a dangerous, a desperate errand. You would wish him to return from it in safety ? You would not desire him to perish miserably at the hands of the enemies amongst whom he is certain to fall ? ”

He smiled confidently as he spoke, knowing what torture he was inflicting on his victim.

“ I have it from the god himself that the young man shall be preserved through every peril that may assail him, that he shall be brought back to your arms and made yours for ever, both in this world and the next ; but only on the condition that you do this deed which is imposed upon you. Hah ! Do you now fully comprehend your position ? ”

That question he put in a tone of absolute and overwhelming confidence, but seeing how the miserable girl still hesitated and shrank back, he continued boldly to urge her.

“ You know all, my daughter, and must now make your choice. On the one hand, everything you hold dear in this world and in the long here-

after will be yours, for the god can and will bring your lover to your feet, and promises to you and to him everlasting bliss ; on the other hand, you will sacrifice the brave young fellow, you will give him over to his foes without remorse if——”

“ Ah ” she shrieked, unable longer to contain herself ; “ father, speak not so if you would not drive me to distraction.”

But he minded her not, and hurried on with a cruel satisfaction.

“ He dies, and you will never see him again, never hear his voice, never touch his hand ! He is lost to you—his very name is accursed.”

“ Nay, nay ! ” cried she again. “ This can never—must never be.”

“ This, and much more ! ” he continued remorselessly. “ Your old uncle, the Colonel-sahib, will meet with a terrible death, for those that thirst for his blood—and they are many—will have him within their grasp.”

“ Horrible ! ” she murmured, a cold shiver convulsing her.

"And as for *you*, my child," glancing half-pityingly at her, "tongue cannot speak what the god's sentence will be. Partly you know it, partly it has been revealed—a living and a breathing sacrifice to one who knows no mercy, who will wither your beauty and destroy your soul—aye, and render both body and soul such that you yourself will loathe and destest them! What say you to such a lot as that?"

The girl gazed at him, lost in a vague dread of undefined horrors.

"And yet," he continued, in a softer strain, "'tis as you will, my daughter. Specially favoured, you have been chosen from among many to carry out his design, because the god loves you and desires only what is for your good ; but, should you fail, others are at hand to do the holy behests, for the decree once issued, as it has been, must be executed."

A burst of the wild and deafening music that had, at her previous visit, so startled Lilian now again echoed through the temple, and, as the

Brahmin pointed silently upwards, she perceived the arm of the god graciously beckoning to her with the mysterious motion he had so often used.

It was a moment of deepest struggle within the soul of the doomed girl, but the immediate effect of the harsh clangour was to rouse the blood of her Rajpoot ancestors within her, those ancestors who in the last sad hour at Chittore had preferred death to dishonour ; and, all unknowing, she chose the part that they had chosen, and gave up for ever all the longings, all the hopes, all the unutterable happiness she had fully believed might be hers, whether on earth or in heaven.

"The deed the god would impose upon me," she began faintly, in the pause that succeeded the noise of the music, "is a hideous crime that my nature revolts from—a detestable wickedness that I spurn and reject."

She stopped, for the Brahmin's face underwent such a change as appalled her, his brows contracting fiercely, and his terrible eyes being brought

close to her face as if to startle her into terror and silence. But the noble impulse of her nature gained strength as she was speaking, and her tone was more assured as she continued.

"Yes, I begin to see something of the danger into which I have been brought—of the wicked course on which I have entered! Faintly and dimly it may be, as yet," reaching out before her as though to grasp some friendly hand, "but with a growing certainty and a clearing vision!"

The Brahmin, hardly even now believing in her rejection of his specious promises, and only comprehending imperfectly her present attitude, here interposed.

"Is my child really demented that she speaks thus to those she loves?" he said.

Lilian drew away from him in scorn.

"I am no longer the child of such as you!" she exclaimed with vehemence, "and I cast from me utterly and for ever all subservience to your authority and all allegiance to your god!"

As she stood there before the altar and poured

forth these noble words, her figure and attitude betokening in every line her detestation of the villainy that had been proposed to her, she might well be thought a worthy daughter of her mother's race, ready at a moment to sacrifice her life and her love and to dare the vengeance of the god in whom she would fain have trusted, rather than commit an act from which her conscience and her better self shrank in utmost horror.

The Brahmin's countenance became convulsed with disappointed rage, and for a moment it appeared as if he would seize the unprotected girl and brain her on the spot with one of the heavy clubs that lay close at hand for the murderous purposes to which they were sometimes put, but no such good fortune was in store for her, as the fellow remembered in time the diabolical plan he had prepared in case of her resistance.

"And is that your final decision, and do you dare to speak in language like this, to break all your solemn pledges, to cast to the winds your

oft-repeated promises, and to insult the god whom your mother worshipped with all the fervour of her noble race?"

His appeal was well worded, but it fell on ears that had become deafened and a spirit that quailed not.

"You have spoken," she cried boldly, "something of my meaning in those words of yours. Pledges and promises to such a god as this! I scorn to buy his proffered favour at the price you have named, and defy both him and you to do your worst!"

A low rumbling sound was heard within the temple, the smoke rose round the altar in yet thicker clouds, and Lilian, fainting and helpless, felt herself jerked suddenly forward right into the dense and suffocating fumes which immediately rendered her senseless; yet in that moment of consternation and horror she became aware that a powerful force was controlling her, and, as after an interval her consciousness slowly returned and she regained her sight, she perceived that, half-

prostrate as she was, she was lying within the close embrace of the young Mahomedan, Secunder Khan, whose cruel eyes glared triumphantly and pitilessly into hers !

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STORM BURSTS.

“WHAT do you tell me?” cried Colonel Scott, as Bhagut, the bearer, stood before him salaaming deeply and looking as miserable a creature as it was possible to conceive; “that Missy Lilian has been lost, and that you know not where she has gone?”

“The sahib has spoken the truth,” muttered the old fellow, placing his hands together and again touching the earth with his forehead. “We cannot find my young mistress anywhere.”

It was early on the morning after Lilian’s seizure at the temple, and the Colonel was drinking his tea before mounting for parade Bhagut had just announced to him the sad news.

"But, you old scoundrel, you know where you saw her last, and can tell me so much to enable a search to be instantly begun," he shouted.

"It was at her own desire she went to the Brahmin's temple after nightfall," replied the man, thoroughly alarmed by the Colonel's vehemence ; "and during my temporary absence for the purpose of drinking at the well, she disappeared, nor could I find anywhere the palki and the bearers."

"Most suspicious, you old villain ! I have heard your mistress speak of that temple, just above the river ; I know the place. The Brahmin there is at the bottom of the affair, I'll be bound, so we'll have him laid by the heels in the first instance."

"Oh, spare the holy man, sahib !" exclaimed Bhagut ; "I would answer for him with my life ! Touch him not, or the consequences may be very serious !"

But his words were lost, for the Colonel, sitting down, wrote a hasty line to Mr. Conway, the magistrate, telling him of his niece's disappearance

of the the story of the bearer, and of his strong suspicions respecting the priest, and asking him to institute an immediate search and inquiry, adding that he would see him presently on the matter. As his horse was brought round he gave the note to Kulloo, the boy, impressing on him the necessity of hastening with it at once ; but to his great surprise, after he had left the bungalow, the lad following him, touched his knee, and besought him not to persist in his intention of riding to the parade-ground.

“There is a terrible danger threatening, Protector of the poor, and I hear whispers of what is expected to occur this very morning,” the boy persisted.

“Nonsense, Kulloo, nonsense!” cried the Colonel ; “you take that note at once, and mind you bring the answer to me on parade.”

But though it was not fated that Colonel Scott was to have an answer to that or any other note in this world, on he cantered, his honest heart heavy with anxiety on account of his dear niece,

but harbouring no suspicion of the peril that was close to himself. At the edge of the ground Slingsby rode up and reported the number of men on parade.

"And I am sorry to say, Colonel," continued he, "that the Pathan, Ghoolam Ali Khan, has this moment ridden in, and reports that the troops we sent off to keep the main road open has mutinied near to Ahtabad, and declared its intention of marching to Delhi."

"The villains!" cried the Colonel, "they have dared to do it, have they?"

"I'm not sure if the rest of the regiment knows it yet," Slingsby went on, "but I hear talking in the ranks, and fancy I see sullen looks."

"Really I can't think they would be such fools now, Slingsby, or such knaves either, after all the time that has passed, and the promises they have given."

"No, indeed," rejoined Slingsby, "but one of those who has been most forward in his promises is missing this morning—a very suspicious circumstance; I mean Secunder Khan."

The Colonel pulled up his horse sharply, for they had arrived in front of the regiment, but he hardly looked at the men as he replied—

“Missing! Secunder Khan missing?”

“Yes, sir; so Heera Singh reports. I have sent——”

A wild shout caught his ear, and from the ranks a soldier was observed suddenly to emerge at full speed, his horse apparantly being beyond his control, for he made directly towards the position occupied by the two officers. Was it really that the animal was too much for his rider, or could it be possible that the Lancer was bent on a public and audacious display of his horsemanship and skill, inopportune as the moment appeared?

As he came nearer he was seen to be no other than the old sergeant, Mahomed Buksh, and, owing partly to his knowledge of the discontented character of the man, partly to the extraordinary course he was following, it flashed across Slingsby that this was no game that was being played, but a stern reality, and that the Colonel and he stood in

the greatest and most imminent danger of being struck down thus treacherously and without warning, in the very front of their men. Instantly drawing his sword he rode full tilt at the sergeant, attempting to parry his charge on the Colonel; but the momentum was too great, and the well-levelled lance passed clean through the old officer, who, falling from his horse with a groan of agony, died where he lay in a few seconds.

“Shābāsh!” shouted the old sergeant, withdrawing his weapon from the body of his brave commander as calmly as if he had just ridden a course at neza-bazi. “Shābāsh! So may it be with all the cursed infidels! Now, brothers, you know what to do, and I, Mahomed Buksh, call upon you to do it. Make short work with the budmash Slingsby—Deen! Deen! Deen!”

But with the rush of a whirlwind Slingsby was upon him, and his sword clove open the sergeant's chest with a clean cut from the shoulder almost before the words were out of his mouth. Truly a swifter retribution could not have overtaken the

traitor, who, falling on the plain close by his late Colonel, gasped out his life as his blood literally mingled in the pool formed by the heart's blood of his victim.

Then arose a tumult beyond description—an uproar that defied all Slingsby's efforts to quell it; a din of yelling that drowned his voice, shout as lustily as he might. In a moment the ranks were broken, and troopers, galloping in perfect recklessness hither and thither apparently without an object and in simple devilry, fired their pieces and shrieked their war-cries, and called on their gods to direct them, so that to Slingsby it was plain that, whatever had been the intention of the leaders, their hand had been forced and the mutiny that had at length come was premature. Bitter thoughts welled up in his breast as the wild whirl of horsemen passed by, to think that in a moment, as it were, the splendid regiment he had taken such pride in had melted like snow before the evil breath of sedition, while its honoured commander lay treacherously murdered beside him.

But, amid all this confusion, so many balls came whistling past him that the young officer, feeling utterly helpless, and that he was simply becoming the mark of the more pitiless of his men, was turning his horse to leave the ground when the old Seikh, Heera Singh, rode up at the head of a body of his countrymen, and, saluting hurriedly, asked for his commands.

"Ah! Heera Singh!" he exclaimed, delighted to see these faithful ones, "I guessed you would not desert me, whatever might happen."

"No, no, sahib!" cried the old Seikh, showing his teeth for a moment; then as his eye fell upon the body of his old commander, pouring out a series of oaths. "But you did nobly by that budmash, Mahomed Buksh, and I heard men near me admiring and praising you for it, mutineers though they were."

Smiling grimly, Slingsby put himself at the head of the little body of Seikhs and rode straight through the raging throng around, calling on all good and loyal men to follow where he should lead

them ; nor was he entirely unsuccessful in his appeal, for Ghoolan Ali Khan, the Pathan, and several others joined him, delighted to show their faithfulness at a moment when so few remained faithful.

“ Boom ! ”

Then a moment of pause, and again “ Boom ! ” and again, and again, and again ; for the guns had opened with grape upon that tumultuous crowd, and already numbers were falling under the deadly shower, biting the dust and writhing in agony on the plain, beside the Colonel they had for years adored as their best friend, yet whose barbarous murder they had but now witnessed without a murmur of dissent.

Not an instant too soon had Slingsby and his little party ridden off ; but as they made their way through the main road of the cantonment they found that confusion reigned everywhere, for the contagion of mutiny had spread to the Infantry, bands of whom were patrolling the roads, shooting any Europeans they might meet, entering the houses and murdering the helpless women and

children sheltering there, as they crouched tremblingly in the dark corners of the bath-rooms and store-closets, or, perchance, concealed themselves in the huts of those amongst their servants that had remained true to them. On every hand bungalows and buildings of all kinds were in a blaze, for, after they had looted the contents, and left no living Feringhis within, the maddened sepoy invariably lighted the thatch, and had the demoniacal satisfaction of seeing the houses of the English those homes hitherto considered by them inviolable, burn like tinder, and become within an hour naught but blackened heaps of ashes.

A body of these men was just entering the gate of General Davis's garden as Slingsby rode up, and so excited were they, and so emboldened by the uninterrupted success they had met with in their course of murder and destruction, that they did not comprehend for a moment his sharp challenge to them.

"Hah ! hah !" laughed their leader, covering the young officer with his musket, "we'll have you first,

Captain Budmash, and then go in for the General's mem-sahib, whom I propose myself to bayonet."

He fired, but Heera Singh, rushing in at the instant, struck his piece up with his sword, and the ball passed harmlessly over the trees above, whilst Slingsby, riding straight at the scoundrel, ran him through with the blade that had once already done him such good service that morning.

"Charge the betrayers—those who have been false to their salt!" he shouted. "Spare them not, the wretches who would murder their General's wife! Cut them to pieces, oh, my brothers; let them not escape the edge of your swords!"

And the Seikhs did not spare them, and for the next few minutes there was stiff work at that gateway; but, whether because they had no real stomach for fighting, or that at such close quarters the swords and pistols had an advantage over the bayonets—for lances and muskets could not be used much on either side—certain it is that the mutineers had all the worst of the combat, and

that, except those who effected an early escape, none of the band presently remained alive to spread the flame of rebellion, or contribute further to the anarchy that prevailed on every hand.

“Now to the bungalow!” exclaimed Slingsby breathlessly, as he wiped his bloody blade on his horse’s mane, “we must rescue the mem-sahib without delay, and bring her with us to the rendezvous.”

“Hah, sahib!” cried Heera Singh, “we are ready for any adventure now, and will follow you to the death. They have killed my young nephew, you see,” pointing to one of the troopers lying under the tree by the gate, “and I long to have another chance at them.”

“That you may make sure of,” said Slingsby, with decision; “and I am only sorry we must leave the brave young fellow where he is, but there is no help for it. Threes right—forward!”

They trotted up to the house, where the utmost confusion and consternation prevailed. A number of ladies had come there from their own bungalows,

many of which were burning brightly close by, bringing with them their children and a handful of valuables hastily gathered together, thinking vainly to find safety where a guard of the Red Dirks was as they knew on constant duty ; but, the General himself being far away trying to restore order amid the disorganisation around, Mrs. Davis was absolutely at her wits' end to know what step to take to save the helpless crowd that looked to her for protection.

“ Ah, Captain Slingsby,” she said, “ you have come just in time to save us from those wretches. How good of you. But what a fight you had at the gate ! We have all watched you from the verandah with what hopes—in what an agony ! ”

“ Yes, we have, indeed ! ” joined in several of the others, looking dreadfully scared. “ What are we to do with the children if they come again ? ”

“ Give me your sword, Taptain Slingsby, and I will defend mamma and baby ! ” exclaimed a shrill little voice that proceeded from a small flaxen-haired boy who was trying to cool with a

punkah his little sister as she lay in her mother's arms.

They all smiled, oppressed as they were with anxiety, at this sally, and even the grim Seikhs appeared half to understand the lad's meaning.

"Very well, Tommy," laughed Slingsby, who, always a favourite with children, used often to play romping games with the lad, and now and again gave him a mount for a few minutes on his horse, "you shall come up before me presently, but it is necessary you ladies should all leave the cantonment at once, and you know the Treasury was fixed on for the rendezvous as being the safest and most defensible position."

"Is it so bad as that?" asked Mrs. Davis, looking round in despair at all her beautiful furniture and favourite nick-nacks. "And must we leave everything to be ruined by these wretches?"

"Well, that is the order," replied Slingsby, "and, as there are between two and three thousand of them that have broken loose, no time should be lost in obeying it."

So all the carriages that could be collected were enlisted in the service, and a long train it was that presently, under the escort of Slingsby and his Seikhs, wended its way to the Treasury, a point they reached without mishap, rather to the disappointment of Tommy, who, from his elevated seat on his friend's saddle, looked down somewhat contemptuously on the crowd below him. Here they found the Commissioner, the Magistrate, and most of the other civilians and their wives assembled ; and before long were joined by some of the officers whose regiments had revolted, when many wonderful stories of their hairbreadth escapes were related, and many a sorrowful tale told of the loss of loved comrades who had fallen before the treacherous attacks of their own trusted soldiers.

Then appeared the guns, escorted by the Red Dirks, with the General and several other officers, for the mutinous regiments had now been joined by thousands of discontented ruffians from the city, and by a small army raised by the pretended Nawab, whose cause Secunder Khan had espoused

so that the hostile force had assumed very formidable dimensions. The blows it had received during the morning's fighting had had a momentary effect on it, but its successful butchery of unarmed Europeans, its robberies and burnings and unbridled license had so inflamed and excited it as to make an attack on the Treasury, where many lakhs were lying, inevitable, and it was to obviate the success of any such attempt that the troops at the General's disposal were now being concentrated.

The position, being in fact an old serai or defensible resting-place for travellers, was on the whole a strong one, and consisted mainly of an outer and inner square, the walls of whose masonry were many feet thick, with an entrance gateway containing several apartments of good size both over the gate itself and on either hand of it. The first court was a very large one, and had a long range of stalls running round, intended for the accommodation of the servants and horses of travellers ; while the second, of smaller size, con-

tained rooms of a superior class, which, though now in a state of decay, had been honoured by the presence of the mighty Akbar himself, who indeed was reputed to have been its original constructor. In this building, which formed the Treasury and was by the natives considered a fort, had been by the foresight of the Commissioner and the General secretly collected a store of grain and rice and firewood, and other necessities sufficient to support some hundreds of people in case of necessity, while an excellent well ensured a never-failing supply of water. Sheep had been driven in by the commissariat officer at the last moment, and a score or so of them were now bleating in the large square, while half-a-dozen bullocks were packed closely together in one corner. The necessary store of ammunition for the troops had also been carefully laid in, and altogether no precaution neglected to ensure the completeness of the safety of those who had to seek a hasty asylum there. More than that was not intended, as it seemed unlikely that the European troops, small

as their number was, could not at least hold their own against any number of thousands of the natives when once their women and children had been placed beyond the reach of sudden danger.

For some time the utmost confusion prevailed, and, till quarters, such as they were, could be assigned to the different members of the little garrison, there was no rest for the officer who had charge of that department ; while the distribution of the guards to the various posts, the mounting of the guns at the most commanding points, the strengthening of the parapets with sand-bags, and the settling of innumerable other strategical considerations, kept the officers, from the General downwards, hard at work.

While Slingsby was giving some orders to Heera Singh he suddenly observed before him the boy Kulloo, salaaming and holding out a letter to him.

"Hulloa, Kulloo!" he cried, in some surprise, "I'm glad to see you here, but it's an odd time to bring a note for anyone."

"Hah, sahib," replied the boy, grinning in his

usual manner, though his face had a scared look upon it. "The Colonel-sahib ordered me to deliver it at once to the magistrate-sahib, and I have been all the morning looking for him."

Slingsby glanced at the direction, and, seeing it was in Colonel Scott's well-known hand, said he would himself deliver it.

"But I was to take the reply at once to the sahib!" cried the lad, "and he will be very angry if I fail."

"My boy, the Colonel will never read a note again," answered Slingsby, gravely. "He has been murdered, Kulloo, and now lies stiff and cold on the parade-ground over yonder, for we could not even bring him off."

"Oh, sahib! the good Colonel—the father of his men!" exclaimed the boy, bursting into tears.

And have they really killed him? I felt certain things were not right this morning, and tried to warn him, but he was so brave, so trusting."

"I wonder you had not heard of his death," Slingsby observed, eyeing him closely; "but I

suppose you went off to the civil lines at once with this note."

"Hah, sahib; and when I found everyone was hurrying here I thought I had better come too, for the magistrate-sahib would probably drive here," replied the lad.

"Quite right, quite right, my boy," said Slingsby "and here he comes, so we can give him the letter. Conway, this is for you, from Colonel Scott, brought by this boy of his."

The man addressed was a short light-haired fellow, active and energetic, who it was plain did not relish being interrupted in his work.

"Confound it!" he exclaimed, tearing open the letter. "What's this? 'My niece, Miss Langford, has disappeared. Bearer reports that, he being in charge of her, she went to see the Brahmin of the temple by the river last night, and, on his return, after a few minutes' absence, could not be found. Strong suspicion rests on this Brahmin, who should be immediately seized. Please reply at once if this can be done.—Yours sincerely, T. Scott.'" But

I thought Scott unfortunately had been massacred !”

“So he has, Conway,” cried Slingsby, greatly moved, “but he wrote this early to-day, before going out. What is to be done about Miss Langford, for I suppose she is not here ?”

While listening to the magistrate as he was reading, Slingsby had drunk in the intelligence respecting Lilian’s disappearance with eagerness, recalling instantly the night when he had overheard the talk between Bhagut and Spencer’s bearer, had gathered that Lilian’s habit was to visit the Brahmin at various times, and had actually distinguished her in the palki as it was carried off towards Jahmere.

“No,” replied Conway quickly, “I have just seen Mrs. Davis, who asked me if I had any news of Miss Langford, as the other ladies knew nothing of her, and are deploring her being left behind.”

“’Tis an extraordinary thing,” said Slingsby, his wonder and dissatisfaction increasing the more he thought of the matter, “but I had not learned this

till now, when the Colonel's note was given me by the boy there."

"You did not see the Missy-sahib this morning?" asked Conway, sharply turning on Kulloo.

"No, sahib, she was not at the bungalow at all, so I was told by Bhagut," answered the lad with readiness; "and the Colonel seemed very angry about it."

"I don't wonder," muttered Conway, "if she had had any dealings with that villain of a Brahmin."

"Do you know him?" enquired Slingsby, cautiously. "I have a reason for asking, though all I have heard of him is that he is a Brahmin of a singularly saintly character."

Conway's face assumed a peculiar expression.

"Know him!" he said. "I have had my eye upon him for long, but he is too clever to be easily caught, and now, when there is really something tangible on which to act, I am tied hand and foot here."

"I see," observed Slingsby, speaking slowly, for

he was turning over many things in his mind. "Yet there is nothing to be done, I fear, towards arresting the old fellow or rescuing the poor girl."

"Absolutely nothing," returned Conway. "I can't think, Slingsby, why Miss Langford ever went to that temple. What could she have had to do with the Brahmin, do you think?"

That was a point that had long puzzled Edward Slingsby, but appeared no nearer its solution now than it had weeks ago when he first became aware of her strange and apparently inexplicable conduct. Suspicions he hardly dared harbour rose up in his mind, but he strove to thrust them from him and to assume an air of unconcern as he answered Conway.

"'Tis impossible for me to account for Miss Langford's conduct," he said, "quite impossible. And yet I cannot help fearing I was to blame in not riding at once to see after her safety, though if, as now appears, she was not at the bungalow, it would have been useless."

"I say, Conway," interrupted Smith, the assist-

ant magistrate, coming up hurriedly at this moment with a paper in his hand, "we have made out that all those living in the civil lines are here except that young Delmar, the barrister, but of him there are no tidings."

"I'm sorry to hear that," replied Conway, "because I like what I've seen of Delmar, and lately he has been dangerously ill—in fact almost off his head. His nurse half feared he might do something desperate."

"It may be," suggested Smith, "that he has been made away with, for we know he was in the Lodhpore case, and not certainly on the popular side."

"Quite true, young man!" exclaimed Conway. "There is little doubt this insurrection we now have to meet is partly due to the pretended Nawab's suddenly appearing here, having been deputed from Delhi with messages from the old puppet of an Emperor to the native soldiery, whom he has been only too successful in corrupting."

Slingsby looked with some astonishment at the magistrate as he spoke.

"You appear to hold the threads in a wonderful manner," he said, "and I only marvel you could not have done something to forestall all this mischief that has occurred."

"My dear fellow," replied Conway, "'tis easy to find fault after the event, but a magistrate must have proofs on which to act, and the evidence before me was insufficient for that purpose."

"Surely you might have arrested this false Nawab?" Slingsby ventured to say.

"Well, that was about to be done," answered Conway, "but the mutineers were before us, and struck their blow sooner than we expected. And who, do you think, was probably the main instrument in causing that?"

"How can I tell? I am not a seer in these matters," said Slingsby, incredulously.

"And yet," observed the magistrate, "this moving spring was close to you—was daily under your observation—was, in fact, a trusted agent of

yours and of Colonel Scott's. I mean your Mahomedan native officer, Secunder Khan."

"You don't say so!" cried Slingsby, in some confusion. "Secunder Khan! Ah, how many things that explains! What light it throws on circumstances I have time after time racked my brains over in vain!"

"Well, I have long suspected this man," continued Conway, "and fancied I knew even about the day and the hour—it was to be in the evening—that his plans were to mature; but there has been a mistake or a misapprehension somewhere, and here we are shut up before the time."

"True enough," remarked Slingsby, gravely; "this fellow, Secunder Khan, was absent from parade this morning, and I have heard nothing of him since."

"Something has occurred, you may be sure—something of importance—to prevent his being on the scene," said Conway, half to himself. "Now, is it possibly connected with that old villain of a Brahmin, whose temple, the scene of their

machinations, Secunder Khan so often visits? Whe-e-e-h! I have it. This Miss Langford! Knowingly, or unknowingly, she is mixed up in this business, having, as it seems, gone to that temple—not perhaps for the first time—last evening.”

“But you don’t mean to suggest,” protested Slingsby, “that that charming girl would so compromise herself as to meet a villain like Secunder Khan? Really, Conway, this is beyond what seems possible, leaving all probability out of the question.”

And yet, as he spoke, the young officer’s mind misgave him, for he realised even more certainly than Conway could do, the position Lilian Langford seemed placed in, while regretfully acknowledging that she herself must in reality be mainly to blame for it.

“My duty is to put this and that together,” replied the magistrate, shrugging his shoulders, “and our information is not perfect at the present moment. Where, for instance, is the bearer who

accompanied Miss Langford to the temple? He returned without her, apparently."

"The man is perfectly trustworthy," answered Slingsby, with decision, "having been her mother's servant before she was born. There can be no question about him."

"I should like to see him, nevertheless," said Conway, "just to put a few questions to him. It's quite possible I might——"

"Whir-r-r!"

It was the hiss of a round-shot passing over their heads, and the crash and confusion that followed showed it had fallen into the corner of the yard, causing a general stampede among the camp followers collected there; yet all the harm it did was to break away one of the partition walls of the stable, and kill an unfortunate horse in his stall.

The siege had, however, begun in earnest, and soon shot after shot took rapid effect within that little enclosure, wounding and killing many of the garrison, and rendering the place so hot that safety

could only be found under cover of the thick and solid walls and towers of the serai.

But now the guns and mortars of the garrison took up their tale, replying with accuracy and rapidity to the enemy's fire, occasionally dismounting one of their pieces, or dropping a shell right into the battery they had hastily established behind a mound within two hundred yards of the defenders' position ; while a few picked marksmen of the Red Dirks kept up such an incessant hail of well-directed bullets on the heads which occasionally showed above the cover, that, after a time no open movement could be detected amongst the enemy ; and, except for the continual booming of the guns and the whizzing of the balls that fell into every corner, it might have been thought the assailants were drawing off from the attack. Such, however, was very far indeed from the truth.

CHAPTER XVII.

LILIAN.

“QUICK! quick!” shouted Secunder Khan, as he stood on the narrow ledge above the river just outside the entrance to the Brahmin’s temple. “Help me to carry her up, you two fellows, for she has fainted again, and is no light weight, I can tell you.”

“We’ve got her, and we won’t let her go, sahib,” responded a brawny ruffian, instantly seizing Lilian under the arms, while a second held aloft a lantern which showed the edge of the precipice close to them.

“Gently with her, though—gently and carefully, my brothers!” exclaimed the young Mahomedan,

gazing at his victim in triumph, yet with some tinge of anxiety. "She is a prize worth winning, yet one that requires careful handling, for the moment she recognised me, she went off again into this faint."

"All right, sahib, fear not," muttered the man, as he forced the unhappy girl along, carrying her up the steps with the other fellow's help, and landing her at last safely at the summit of the cliff.

"Now, the palki should be close by if you obeyed my orders," cried Secunder Khan, looking round anxiously.

"We forced the wretches to bring it within reach, threatening to cut out their tongues if they ran away," said the man; "and, as she is their mistress, I shall be surprised if they are not here."

"Rām ! rām !" spoke a voice from the darkness, "your humble slaves are present, and at your service, most honourable sir."

The head palki-bearer salaamed low before Secunder Khan, whom, by a quick intuition, he saw to be the master of the situation, and imme-

diately his fellows came up with their mistress' litter on their shoulders.

"Scoundrels!" exclaimed the young Mahomedan "Why are you not in waiting for your mem-sahib when you had received the order?"

"Protector of the Poor, blame them not," cried the sirdar-bearer, joining his palms together, and bending low. "Our mem would never allow us on her nightly visits to proceed so far as this with her, and we could not believe at first it was her command."

This shaft, whether intended or not, told at once, and Secunder Khan became furious.

"Son of a pig!" he exclaimed, "open the palki and let your mistress be instantly laid in it; then bring her where I shall show you, or I will have you skinned alive and thrown to the jackals."

So saying he signed hastily to his retainers, who, lifting the girl without a word, placed her safely in the litter. As they did so she opened her eyes in wonder, puzzled, no doubt, by the strange faces of the men; but, when the sirdar-bearer made his

salaam to her she sank back and allowed herself to be carried away, satisfied, perhaps, that all was right, and that she was being conveyed home. The bearers, however, were grumbling audibly, being specially uneasy that Bhagut was not with them, and when they came to a fork in the road, and were directed by Secunder Khan to take the right hand turn instead of the other, to which they were accustomed, their sirdar attempted to remonstrate.

"The Colonel-sahib will be very angry," he ventured to say, "if the Missy-baba is not back at the bungalow in proper time, and I may lose my place in consequence ; therefore, great sir, I would humbly ask that we may bear her home by the shortest route."

"Son of an unbelieving mother !" hissed Secunder Khan, holding his pistol at the head of the poor wretch. "Your brains shall be scattered on the road if you hesitate to obey my commands instantly, therefore, convey the palki to the city, or your miserable existence is at an end."

Thus threatened, the man gave way, though unwillingly, for his mind misgave him, and now, more than ever, he felt he was being made a tool of in a business of which he could not approve ; yet the savage looks of the young Mahomedan and his two villainous followers so impressed him that he dared not open his lips, and before long the party arrived, after a tedious passage through the tortuous streets, at the very house in the city where the meeting of the conspirators had taken place.

As the bearers, at a signal from Secunder Khan, set down the palki, with their customary "Rām ! rām !" the sirdar pushed open the door, and Lilian, half-unconsciously, stepped out, evidently believing herself at her own door, but, next moment perceiving her mistake, drew back in amazement.

"Where are we, Bhagut ?" she cried, "and what place have you brought me to now ?"

But, again the merciless arms of the two strong men closing around her, compelled her to advance, and rapidly she was forced up a staircase into a small apartment exquisitely furnished in the native

fashion, with handsome green satin cushions disposed against the walls, a thick carpet from Bokhara in which the same colour prevailed covering the floor, and a delicate silver lamp hanging from the ceiling and casting a gentle light on all below. Such was the suddenness of this kaleidoscopic change, that poor Lilian's breath was taken away, and, when the next moment, the purdah having been dropped and the door closed behind her, she was left standing there without support, she felt the utmost difficulty in realising her changed position.

There was time to note, however, in the further corner a pile of shawls, from which projected what seemed a thick block of wood ; yet, even as Lilian looked, there appeared some movement, and she shook with an inward shiver when convinced that a huge light brown eyelid had veiled just for an instant the orb of a monster whose form was concealed amid the folds of the shawls, yet whose attention was fixed on her, and from whom escape was impossible.

Turning round in this terrible strait, she raised the purdah, and was in the act of trying to push open the door, to which there appeared to be no handle, when she felt a sudden blow from behind, and on reeling backwards was confronted by an enormous lizard, whose jaws opened ominously, and whose bloodshot eyes rolled and winked at her in a manner startling and unearthly. Again she felt a smart concussion, and perceived it was due to the sharp whisk of the creature's scaly and massive tail ; nor did the blows cease till, in sheer horror, she dropped the purdah and fled to the other side of the chamber, where, piling the cushions one on top of another, she strove to make a place of safety for herself.

The situation was indeed a terrible one, for the creature lay at the foot of the purdah as if guarding the door, its fearful eyes rolling towards her, their never-ceasing vigilance interrupted only for a moment by the quick movement of the lids, while its flail-like tail was frequently jerked back and forward as if to warn her of its

readiness to meet any hostile demonstration on her part.

Horrible as it was for the unfortunate girl to have been thrown thus suddenly into the power of the profligate Secunder Khan, many of whose words and looks, incomprehensible as they had been at the time, now came back to her only too distinctly, bearing with them their full significance, it seemed indeed a barbarous aggravation of cruelty to force on her the companionship of such a creature as this, in the close and stuffy atmosphere of that little room. For a moment she gave way to absolute despair, but after a short space of agonised watching, finding that the loathsome animal appeared inclined to leave her in peace, Lilian tried to take a calm view of her position, and to estimate the chance of her ever escaping from what she felt certain was a trap laid for her by the wily Mahomedan. Of him personally she had had only that cruel glimpse when she lay within his arms amid the smoke-wreaths at the shrine in the temple, for he had been careful to

avoid showing himself ; but she had recognised his voice directing the movements of his myrmidons, and could only too easily guess at the reason of her sudden incarceration in the chamber into which she had been so ruthlessly forced. It was too dreadful a position for the miserable and forsaken girl ; yet, to have fallen into the meshes of this villain through the treacherous conduct of the Brahmin—for Lilian could not doubt that so it had occurred—was perhaps only a just retribution on her for having ventured so far to tamper with holy things, and she could but acknowledge in her wretched self-questionings that she had in some measure deserved the fate that threatened her.

But Lilian Langford was young, and, whatever her fault might have been, she could hardly suppress the hope that even yet she might be delivered from this terrible danger. Were not her own servants—a whole dozen or so of them—within call at the very door of the mysterious house into which she had been cozened ? Could she but make them aware of her dreadful strait they would

surely use some effort to release her and carry her off. Yet how to reach them? The door was impracticable, she knew, and the monster with the never-sleeping eyes guarded it with jealous care. Still, there must be a window somewhere, and through it she might communicate with her own people and call on them for help in distress.

Cogitating thus she heard, amid the stillness of the night, the well-known voice of the sirdar-bearer chatting with the others, and expressing profound dissatisfaction at her prolonged absence.

"No, brothers," he said, "we have been ordered to remain here at present, but my mind misgives me altogether, and I know not what to think."

"If only we had Bhagut with us," exclaimed one of the men, "he would give us the right orders."

"Bhagut has been purposely left behind, my brother," muttered the head bearer, "and I am certain mischief is intended to our young mistress. Pass the pipe round, for I must consider well what is necessary."

"We are not fighting men," said the other, "and

cannot be expected to do anything against these budmashes."

"That is true," answered the sirdar, "and I recommend that we get some sleep while we can, so as to be fresh and ready for work when the morning comes. What say you, brothers?"

"Hah, hah, sirdar!" they assented. "Let us sleep now, at any rate, for who knows what will come with the morning? You are right there—let us seek a safe shelter for sleep!"

Their voices became lost in the distance and they were gone. What would Lilian not have given to communicate with them—to gain their assistance, poor cowards though they were, in her dire necessity?

Behind the hangings which shrouded the walls of her little prison-room she felt sure there must be a concealed window, and, on looking up, a hollow space became apparent at a point to which, on account of her height, she could just reach with her finger-tips by standing on the pile of cushions; but the opening was so small and deeply sunk as

to be practically useless, for it would not allow her hand to pass out, having innumerable bars running across it, and she could not go anywhere near touching it with her mouth in order to make herself heard outside. It was, in truth, the barred loophole of a prison, and as the girl after one or two fruitless attempts sank down half fainting on the soft pillows below, and became aware of the rapid movement towards her of the reptile with its never-resting tail, which again struck her repeated blows, she gave herself up for lost, and for the moment, half in despair, determined to wait, reserving her strength for any supreme effort that might be imposed on her.

Terribly fatigued, it was not long before sleep, much as she had dreaded it, overpowered her, and the first faint morning light had come into the sky ere she was wakened by a slap from the broad tail of her unwelcome companion, whom she found in the act of making one of its strange and lumbering peregrinations round the little apartment. Sitting upon her cushions she was startled to see the pur-

dah swayed to one side, and next instant to find herself confronted by the man whom of all she most dreaded and detested—Secunder Khan.

Very handsome the young Mahomedan looked, his dark face somewhat flushed, his curling hair and beard beautifully trimmed and glossy, his crimson and gold pugaree set jauntily on one side, his pure white dress relieved only by a waistband also of red and gold, like the head-gear—a contrast, truly, to the worn and wearied girl, with tangled hair and disordered clothes, whom he had at his mercy in that prison-room that he had contrived for her.

As he bowed in a half-gracious, half-triumphant way before her, his words at any rate were polite if somewhat bold.

“I hope you have rested,” he said, “and have found these cushions as soft as the English mattresses on which your fair form generally reclines?”

Lilian eyed him with disdain, but answered nothing.

"And this pet of mine," he continued, laying hold of the lizard's tail and drawing the animal towards him, "I am sure he guarded you affectionately, lying at his usual post near the door, and effectually preventing any passage through it either from without, or—from within!"

In saying this he smiled significantly—and a cruel smile it was.

Still Lilian, her hollow eyes flaming with anger and detestation, maintained silence, determined, as it seemed, to trample underfoot his unworthy assumption of equality with her, and to treat his proffered favours with contumely.

"You recollect," he went on, after a moment, "how I conjured the Colonel-sahib to allow me to protect you if danger threatened, for that I had the means to save you if I chose to use them?"

He waited for a reply, but still all his victim did was to flout his question with a hasty movement of the hand.

"And the sahib and you accepted my poor service," speaking with something of a sneer; "and

indeed were most eager to swear me to it on the holy Korān."

"You dastard and coward!" burst forth Lilian, unable longer to restrain herself; "you lie in this as you have done in so many other things, false as you are to every tie of truth and honour!"

The young villain again smiled cynically, secretly pleased that he had roused her anger and put her on her mettle.

"Gently, gently, Missy-baba!" he murmured. "Be in no hurry to disown our compact or to reject the service of your slave, for the time of peril has come, and even now, perchance, your uncle—though may Allah protect him!—is riding out to meet his doom."

He paused, watching closely the effect on her of his cruel words.

"You know this!" she exclaimed. Then drawing herself up and throwing a withering glance at him, "But why listen to such a liar, or combat his villainous assertions? That would be simply throwing time away!"

"Perhaps," he observed quietly. "If it is so you may be the best judge and I an ignoramus."

Lilian could not help betraying great uneasiness, though she strove bravely to suppress it.

"For all the English at Jahmere, who have hitherto been the lords of the earth, this is the day of trial," he continued; "the day of trial, hastened and brought about by your obstinacy and rashness; and to you, yourself, Missy-baba, it brings a bad kismut if you refuse the conditions proffered to you."

The unhappy girl, weakened as she was by the events of the night, exhausted by the heat and the shock of her ignoble imprisonment in that little room, was ill-fitted to combat him; yet she held out bravely, repudiating what she thought his words conveyed with all her strength.

"The conditions proffered," she said, shuddering, "were horrible and unnatural—such, indeed, as it was a crime to propose to me—a wickedness to think of."

"As you please," he rejoined, with a shrug;

"but I spoke not so much of what is past as of what is to come."

Lilian's eyes stared at him, showing only wonder as to the exact meaning of what he hinted at.

"'Tis useless to conceal," he went on more rapidly, "the extreme danger of your position—a danger increased threefold by your own absurd conduct at the temple, which has, indeed, but hurried on the catastrophe that was inevitable."

She hung upon his words now, showing how intensely they interested her, and Secunder Khan could not help feeling deeply flattered by her attention.

"Placed as you are," he continued, with a significance that jarred on her ear, "in this desperate peril—a peril on which it is not necessary to enlarge, but from which I can assure you I, who am your humble slave, can alone rescue you—you have but to trust me, and all will be well."

"Trust you!" she cried, as if in a dream. "Trust *you!*"

The Mahomedan laughed below his breath.

“Why not trust me, my pretty lady?” he asked, approaching a step nearer and speaking in his softest tone; “I have said I will redeem my promise, and I speak truth. You shall be saved from the fate of all the English; amid the general massacre you alone shall live, untouched, unharmed—nay, honoured and bowed down to, inasmuch as you will be with me—and I shall be a Prince!”

“You—a Prince! and I—with you!” exclaimed Lilian, shrinking back to the farthest corner and regarding him with a horror she made no attempt to conceal.

“Did you expect my protection for absolutely *no* consideration?” he asked, still pursuing her and attempting to take her hand. “I am kind and merciful, no doubt, yet there is a temptation I cannot withstand, and Allah has placed it before me now, in your lovely eyes, in your soft cheeks, in your houri-like form, that seems to promise me a foretaste of Paradise!”

With his full eyes gloating upon her, with both hands outstretched to seize her, he strove to take

her in his arms, thinking that now, at least, he had gained the price of all his intrigues, of all his lying, of all his double-dyed treachery. But the blood of her Rajpoot mother not less than that of her brave English father failed not, even in this direst of straits, to aid the defenceless girl in the struggle for more than life in which she was thus cruelly and suddenly involved.

“Villain!” she cried, drawing herself up and turning on him a long withering look. “Cowardly scoundrel! Do you dare attempt to touch me—to look at me—to speak to me so?”

“Hah! hah!” he laughed. “That is a very pretty air of yours, my sweet Missy-baba, but its effect is only to embolden me the more. Come, resist not uselessly—give me at least your warm hand in mine!”

Saying that, and assuming his most seductive smile, he seized her long slender fingers with his own, drawing her forcibly towards him, and allowing her to realise by the strength of his grasp what little chance she had of escaping his embraces.

"Dearest!" he murmured, about to kiss her
"The blest moment I have so patiently awaited
has come, for has not a kind Allah delivered you
to me, willing that we may be happy together for
evermore?"

"Vilest of the vile!" shrieked the wretched girl
in a voice of anguish, drawing away her hand and
thrusting it into her bosom. "Thank God, there is
one weapon left to me—one safeguard in this ter-
rible extremity that even you, miscreant that you
are, can hardly rob me of."

"You do not mean," he exclaimed, rapidly re-
treating a step or two and unsheathing his tulwar
"that you are armed? One knows strange things
of the English mem-sahibs, but hardly such a mar-
vel as that."

"I fight not with men, or with demons such as
you!" she replied, forcibly breaking open the sacred
phial that had been entrusted to her by the Brah-
min, which, hitherto concealed in the folds of her
dress, she had now drawn forth. "So put up your
sword and fear not. Armed I am, but 'tis against

myself alone, though with you will rest the honour of having hurried me, with all my sins and imperfections upon me, into the awful presence of the God of the Christians ! ”

She smiled faintly upon him, then placed the glittering phial at her lips, and, before he could reach her, drained it well-nigh to the dregs.

The lizard darted to the door, switching its tail with a vigour that proved it to be more than usually disturbed, and Secunder Khan, horrified at what he had seen, was leaning forward towards the unfortunate girl lying poisoned before him, when a crash took place, the purdah was suddenly plucked aside, and a man entered with a rush, travel-stained, hatless, his drawn sword in his hand.

In that moment Lilian knew that he for whose love she had so long hungered was close to her, that the stranger who had penetrated to the scene of her terrible trial was no other than her adored cousin—Walter Spencer !

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RUINED HOME.

THE two men glared at each other for some seconds without speaking, for Secunder Khan had turned round sharply on hearing the disturbance at the door, and faced young Spencer in considerable amazement, while the latter, seeing the naked tulwar in his hand and the miserable Lilian at his feet, concluded he was despatching her in his ferocious anger.

“Ruffian, to murder women!” he exclaimed. “Am I too late to save her from your cruel blade?”

“Too late to save her? Yes!” cried the Mahomedan, making a desperate cut at him which he parried with some difficulty. “Too late to save her from herself, the poisoned wretch—too late to

give her the heaven on earth she had promised herself as *your wife!* ”

He pressed the young officer back foot by foot, for Spencer felt totally unable to withstand the ferocity of his attack, and had actually touched the wall behind ere he could get his weapon sufficiently into play to check the onslaught.

“By Allah, I have you now!” hissed the Mahomedan, drawing through the air his keen blade, red as it already was with Spencer’s blood, and slashing furiously at his head. “In the name of the Prophet——”

“Die!” yelled the young Englishman, with one desperate lunge passing his sword up to the hilt through the body of his adversary, and in falling forward with the effort just escaping the edge of the tulwar as it dropped from the nerveless hand that had wielded it. “Die, traitor! as those should die who have broken their oaths and been false to their vows of fidelity, sworn though they were on all they held to be holiest and most sacred!”

The warm heart’s blood of Secunder Khan

spurted in a drenching flood over Spencer's arm as he withdrew his long blade and cast the still palpitating body to one side, and when the young Mahomedan's eyes turned up in the last agony towards him, expressing ere they closed for ever the extremest hatred of which they were capable, while his brow contracted and his jaw set in the death struggle, the young Englishman felt a certain satisfaction in having brought to account a villain of the full extent of whose misdeeds towards his cousin he was at present, indeed, not fully informed.

Turning breathlessly to her corner he perceived how ill she appeared, while yet maintaining a brave struggle with the unknown malady that oppressed her.

"Ah, Walter!" cried the poor girl, as he took her hand and gazed wonderingly into her face. "Are you hurt—has that villain wounded you?"

"Nothing much, Lily—a mere scratch," he answered. "But what is the meaning of all this? When riding past by chance on my way from

Ahtabad I was stopped by your sirdar, who said the palki was here waiting for you, but that you had been carried into the upper part of the house—into this den in fact—by that scoundrel there.”

She put her hand to her forehead and stole a glance at the body lying on its back, as if half afraid the Mahomedan might even yet rise from the floor in a final effort ; but, seeing all movement had ceased, she drew a sigh of relief, and shading her face from the lamp-light, spoke to him.

“I have but little time left for explanation, Walter, and even now my sight is dimming and I seem hardly to hear all you say.”

For a moment she paused ; then noting how completely he was puzzled, with an effort she continued, still grasping his hand.

“You should be told how it was I went to the temple, how I was seized there by that wretch and conducted to this house, then hurried up from the palki for his own purposes into this miserable prison-room, where I have spent some terrible hours, my only companion the reptile—where is it now?—

whose tail drove me by its unearthly switching from one point to another."

For an instant she made an effort to rise, but immediately fell back upon the pillows.

"How the room turns round!" she murmured. "Hold me, Walter! There—I cannot stand, and yet—ah! that terrible reptile again!"

The huge lizard rushed past them at this moment, lashing out with its tail all dripping with its master's blood, which it sputtered on to her in a red shower of horrid drops; but the action roused her from the lethargy that was stealing over her, and brought back her mind to the story she was telling.

"Then he came—he, the base, the infamous one, with his fair promises of safety and his invitations to me to trust him. But—ah—I cannot go on—and you can guess the rest, I think!"

Yet Walter Spencer found it difficult even now to comprehend her full meaning.

"I gathered," he said, "that you were not touched—that he had spared you! And yet—but

he lied, of course! My poor, darling Lily—only to think of this!”

A faint smile came over her beautiful face.

“No, Walter!” she whispered, drawing him towards her, for her head ached terribly, and a drowsiness against which she vainly struggled oppressed her. “No, he spoke truly in that—and yet—I am dying—dying!”

“Dying!” he exclaimed, peering more closely at her and striving to rouse her to the necessity of action. “Dying!—what can you mean?”

His eye was caught at the moment by the glitter of the phial which had fallen among the cushions on which Lilian lay, and it required but little further revelation to disclose to him the real significance of her words.

“In my dire extremity,” she murmured faintly, “in my hopeless distress and danger, the only chance of saving myself from the destroyer was to take my own unhappy life. I had the means at hand. Do you blame me for using them, Walter?”

"This strange-looking phial," he said, taking it up hastily, "may explain what you say."

"I can hardly see it," she went on, "for oh—this sleep overpowers me. Walter!—Walter! are you there? Have you come back to me, my love?"

"Yes, yes!" he cried, supporting her head with his arm, for a strange spasm came over her, and she lay back as if in a trance. "Darling Lily, rouse up, and you may yet be preserved!"

The lizard scuttled round and struck her with its tail, for Spencer had dropped his sword, intent only on devoting himself to the dying girl, so that the creature had lost the dread his presence had at first inspired in it.

She shivered again, and for a moment her whole frame was convulsed.

Then a serene smile came over her face, and she gently breathed out a few more words—happy words they were, though difficult even for his ear to catch.

"Yes, you have returned from your ride—from your long ride—Walter—my love—Walter!"

You are back safe and well. I am glad—very glad!”

“Lily!” he exclaimed, as she ceased for a moment.

“Brave Walter!” she went on; “I may love you—now! May I tell you how I love you?—Walter!”

“My dearest one!” he cried in an agony of distress.

“You are back—yet it is useless—useless to me—my love! A minute sooner, and, ah, how different it might have been!”

“This is too much!” he murmured. “Could I but call assistance something might be done.”

Her voice was fast failing—her hand and arm shook nervelessly in his grasp.

“Think kindly of me, love!” she gasped out. “Whatever you hear, whatever they may say, believe I was not all bad! Tell Edith how I loved you, how I would have lived for you—lived for you—and died for you! Aye, ’tis for your dear sake, for the love I bear you, I have died! Only

that it was that gave me strength to drink, in that terrible moment, the draught which was to preserve me, to save me from dishonour, to keep me pure, for you, Walter !”

He could bear it no longer, and would have left her to seek what aid he could, but she held him with her dying grasp, and softly breathed her last farewell.

“Good-bye, dear love!” she said. “Good-bye for evermore! I cannot—cannot see you—but I know you are there! ‘Kiss me—my own Walter—kiss me before I leave you !”

He stooped down and kissed her forehead.

“Darling!” she murmured faintly; “dearest love, I go. Walter! Walter——”

She fell back completely prostrate, a strong convulsion so shaking her whole frame that Spencer could not longer support her; nor did she speak again, though her heavy breathing showed how unwilling her young life was to leave her.

At this moment the lizard made another of its

rapid circuits round the room, but, the touch of its unwieldy tail making no more impression on the dying girl than on the dead trunk of its late master, it seemed as though its interest in the little apartment was gone, and it ended its gyrations at the purdah, behind which, thrusting its huge head and finding the door open, it flopped down the staircase and passed, all besmeared with blood as it was, into the open street.

Free to move, yet dreading to leave her, Walter Spencer rose, and, taking in hand his sword, followed the lead thus given him ; nor was he sorry, after the sad passages he had experienced, to breathe again the pure air beneath the open sky, and to look on other sights than that distressing one he had just left. Yet the respite was but momentary, and his point was gained when he had procured some fresh water and had laid hold of two or three of Lilian's bearers, now rapidly collecting round the palki which stood under a shady banyan tree not far from the house where she lay. There was intense excitement among them, for the lizard

had just dashed by, giving more than one a sharp slap with its tail.

"And your honour saw that sheitān!" exclaimed the sirdar, "begrimed with blood as it was—the blood of some victim it had torn to death."

"Nonsense!" said Spencer, knowing the ignorance and credulity of these people. "It was no devil you saw, but only a lizard that had escaped from the very room where your loved mistress now is dying."

"Dying!" cried the man. "My mem-sahib dying? But no wonder if that demon has been with her."

"The demon that attacked her was a far more barbarous one than that poor reptile," responded the young officer, as they hurriedly mounted the stairs; "but you will see him in a moment, for he lies slain as all traitors should—caught in the very trap he had contrived for your innocent young mistress."

Though but a couple of minutes had elapsed since he had left her, Spencer found Lilian far beyond

any earthly assistance, being indeed at the last extremity, and, even as he tenderly raised her and sprinkled over her face some of the water he had brought, the sleep that had oppressed her gave way to the deeper sleep of Death, and she passed without a struggle to the unknown world that was destined in that dark and gloomy time to receive so many of those who, like her, were cut off in the midst of their youth and health and happiness.

“Can it be that she is gone?” cried the young man, distractedly. “Has she really left me thus? Ah, Lilian, my love, my love!”

The timid bearers looked askance at the dead Secunder Khan, half dreading to see him rise from the floor; but Spencer regarded them not, so absorbed was he in his terrible loss. Kneeling there beside the dead girl, of whose deep devotion to him he had only in the moment of losing her become fully aware, he swore to himself that while life should last he would be true to her dear memory, and would cherish in his inmost heart her noble

image for evermore. Then at length he rose, pale and haggard, and spoke to those around him.

"Fear him not," he said, glancing at the native officer's body, "he will never trouble you again ; but help me here, for I need assistance, and we must convey your darling young mem-sahib home."

"And she is dead !" exclaimed the sirdar. "The Missy-baba is really dead ?"

"You see she is dead—that she has ceased to breathe," cried the young officer, looking down at her tenderly.

"Sahib !" exclaimed the head bearer, joining together his hands in supplication ; "she was a dear kind mistress to us, truly a Gem of women. We are her humble slaves and yours, but ask us not to touch her, for that you know would be a great injury to us !"

Spencer eyed him for a moment with disdain.

"Wretched creature ! " he cried ; "I had forgotten to whom I was speaking, but you are not fit to share this duty with me. Leave me alone, then, to perform it as best I may !"

The fellow turned to his companions, and they whispered together a few minutes.

"Friend of the Poor," he said next, turning to Spencer in his most respectful attitude, "we would do all we can to assist your honour, and to show our regard for the dear Missy-baba : may we then bring the palki up here, so that you may place her in it?"

"That you may," replied the young officer, pleased at the thoughtfulness of the man, and glad of this aid : "then we can take her straight away to the cantonment."

By the time his melancholy preparations had been made, and Spencer had regretfully and lovingly wrapped the dead Lilian in two of the shawls that lay in the corner of the little chamber, the morning had far advanced and the sun was high; yet the bearers carried their precious burden with gentle consideration down the narrow stair, and waited with patience under the banyan tree while the young officer untethered his horse and made all ready to start.

Spencer had half feared interruption from Secunder Khan's followers, but no one save an old woman who had charge of the house appeared, and the little procession started on its way unmolested.

"Your master lies stiff and cold in the room up there," said the young Englishman to the house-keeper, as he rode slowly off. "You can guess the reason why, I think, without difficulty!"

The hag gave a grunt, and threw up her hands somewhat theatrically; then salaamed low.

"Great lord!" she cried, "I can but too well conjecture how it happened. He was a good master to me, but when the bearers told me just now what they had seen I marvelled not at it."

So she had already learned the main features of the tragedy enacted in that little room, and, with the strange acquiescence of her race in the inevitable, philosophically set it down to "kismut," not questioning for a moment the right or wrong of it.

When, after a long and weary journey, Spencer and his little party arrived at the cantonment, they

discovered to their amazement the utmost confusion on every hand, and it needed no further evidence than their own eyesight to tell them what had happened ; but, though they found the bungalows in ruins, the church still smouldering, albeit its substantial walls had withstood the action of the fire and looked gaunt and weird amid the desolation around, the point that struck them as most extraordinary was the silence that prevailed throughout, the solitude of the lines and of the barracks, and the apparent total desertion of the entire place by its inhabitants. Here and there, it is true, a native servant might be seen lurking about, unable to tear himself away from the accustomed spot, or a bunniah of the bazar passed furtively along and was lost to sight ere he could be stopped to be questioned ; but Spencer could obtain no information beyond a shake of the head from the one or two persons whom he hailed, and found it the best course to push on straight to Colonel Scott's bungalow.

On passing in through the well-known gateway

it was apparent the mutineers had not treated the gallant old officer's quarters with more consideration than the other bungalows near it, for a smoking ruin was all that was left of the house that had ever held out a warm and cheery welcome to those who, whatever their race or station, had sought his succour or advice. It was evident, too, that the place had been looted as well as burnt, for fragments of furniture, of dress, of written and printed papers, and of innumerable other things lay scattered about in the wildest confusion; while, in the midst, lying on its side, might be seen the poor Colonel's own favourite chair, sitting in which he had been accustomed to hold his friendly talks with the native officers of his own and other corps, whom he loved to meet in this social manner, and who had with one consent dubbed him the Protector of the Friendless, the Cherisher of the Poor.

Here again Spencer was met and perplexed by the absolute silence of the scene. The bearers, from the long course of habit, brought their burden to the edge of the verandah, and there, with a

“Rām! rām!” softly deposited it; yet such a resting-place seemed highly unsatisfactory, and it was necessary to seek further information without delay. Dismounting, and attempting to pass in by the large doorway, Spencer stumbled over an object that he found on examining closely to be the body of an old man—no other, in fact, than that of Bhagut, the bearer, who had evidently, by the marks on his person and clothes, been bayoneted to death. The left arm lay helplessly stretched out on the floor, while in the other hand, which was concealed below him, the young officer found a parcel of jewellery that had doubtless belonged to the unfortunate Lilian, and it looked as if while saving it from the clutches of the sepoys the faithful servant had met his death. Such, indeed, Spencer was presently informed had been the fact, for at that moment he heard a faint voice near him, and on looking up recognised the ayah, Chahni, standing beside him the very image of despair.

“Ah, sahib!” she cried, wringing her hands piteously, “no wonder you look miserable. This is

indeed a day of weeping and lamentation—a time when one prays to be dead, for is there anything left to make life worth living? You have brought indeed the body of my darling mistress, but her soul has fled. Oh! woe and misery unspeakable!”

“My poor Chahni!” replied Spencer, for he knew her well, and how deeply she had loved his lost Lilian. “I am glad to see you at any rate unharmed amid all this wreck; but they would never kill women like you, I should hope.”

“Sahib, I did not trust them,” she went on, still weeping bitterly; “and when they surged up to the bungalow singing their turbulent songs and swearing the good kind Colonel-sahib was murdered that Delmar-sahib’s head had been cut off, and that they would also have the Missy-baba out, I concealed myself in my hut yonder, lying perfectly still.”

“The Colonel dead!” cried Spencer. “Can that be true, I wonder? And poor Delmar, also!”

The ayah mournfully resumed, shaking her head sadly :

"They searched roughly and rapidly, but of course, poor dear Missy, they did not find her! Then Bhagut, who had been crying half the night at her unaccountable absence, was glad she was not here, and, being emboldened by this knowledge, ran before them into her room to try to save some of her valuables."

"The brave old fellow!" exclaimed Spencer, as she stopped for a moment.

"He would have done anything for her, sahib," continued the ayah, "for he loved Missy Lilian as his own child, and was dreadfully troubled about her."

"Was he?" asked the young officer, anxiously.

"Hah, sahib," she replied, "and said something about his having been deceived—but that *I* could not understand it."

"Well—and then?"

"Then they caught him, and set upon him furiously, and stabbed him to death with their bayonets. Ah! it was horrible; and I saw it all—crouching down in my hut over there!"

She held up her hands with the palms outwards, turning aside her face at the remembrance.

"Quickly," she continued "they fired the bungalow, for there was an alarm of someone approaching, and they cleared off as rapidly as they had come."

"Cowards!" cried Spencer through his set teeth.

"It was the Pathan, Ghoolam Ali Khan, and his men that appeared," said the ayah; "and they told me not to fear, for they were going to rest under the big peepul tree over there till they had definite orders from the Captain-sahib."

"They meant Slingsby, no doubt," observed Spencer, looking across the garden in the direction indicated by the faithful ayah. "Ah! here comes the Pathan, and I shall hear more exactly the state of affairs."

The grim and savage looking Ghoolam Ali approached, his hair and beard all dishevelled and the tail of his pugaree drooping on his shoulder.

"Salaam, sahib!" he said, suiting the action to the word, and offering his sword-hilt to be touched.

"Your servant is at your honour's orders in all things."

"No, my friend," replied Spencer, "you are under Captain Slingsby. But, tell me, why are you here and not with him?"

"There is little room for the horses at the Treasury, where all the sahib-logue are," answered the man, "and I suggested to the Captain-sahib that we might be of use in helping stray fugitives on their way by remaining in the cantonment, so he gave us orders accordingly."

"Very sensible indeed," observed Spencer. "Then the Treasury is where they are all gone for the present?"

"Ha, sahib," replied the Pathan, "and from what I can learn a grand attack by all the forces is to take place this evening, for the Nawab has sworn to capture the place and to put all within it to the sword."

"You seem to have accurate information of what is going on," said Spencer, "and, I suppose, have a spy at work."

"My own, brother, sahib," whispered Ghoolam Ali, "is now actually in the heart of the enemy's camp for the second time to day, disguised as a fakir. Within an hour or two he should return with full intelligence, and this I will communicate to you without a moment's delay."

"That is excellent," rejoined Spencer, highly pleased with the man's fidelity and shrewdness. "Now, how many lances can you command? for I shall probably call on you for help before the night arrives."

The Pathan's eyes flashed with delight.

"A dozen good men are ready to follow you to the death, Cherisher of the Poor!" he exclaimed. "They are sleeping now, but you have only to summon them, and they will respond like echoes to your voice."

"Good, my friend," replied Spencer, pleased so far as was possible at the other's eagerness. "I think I see an opportunity for them, and meantime you and I had better follow their example, and get a little rest."

The Pathan took his leave, and, after a hurried mouthful of chuppatties and milk, the first food he had tasted that day, the young officer lay down hoping to snatch a momentary oblivion of the terrible loss that had blighted all his plans of happiness. But it was in vain, and at length he gave up the attempt, determining to drink to the very dregs, during that never-to-be-forgotten night, the cup of grief that had so suddenly and unexpectedly been presented to him.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT THE TREASURY.

THE sun had set in a haze of heat, yet it seemed the night was to be a light one, for a glorious moon threw her full though softened beams upon the scene. The flashes of the guns were very apparent, and the line of musketry-fire became more marked and distinct as the enemy rapidly advanced and swarmed boldly round the old serai in thousands, attempting to destroy its defenders with their storm of missiles, and to overwhelm them by their fierce and determined assault. The shots from their heavy pieces, run up now to within fifty yards of the position, crashed with a fearful noise through the vaulted chambers, crowded as they were by the helpless women and children brought thus suddenly face to face with death, bringing

down quantities of shattered brick and other débris with them, and frequently producing hideous and horrible wounds. The mortars dropped shells through the roofs, which, bursting in the rooms below, caused even a greater terror and consternation ; while a rain of rifle and musket balls penetrated where least expected, reaching the innermost recesses, to which the weakly and the wounded had retreated.

“ This threatens to be more than we can stand,” cried Slingsby, rifle in hand, as he passed the Artillery officer Annesley, hard at work, superintending his gunners. “ I’m going to see the General about making a diversion of some kind with my Lancers, who are useless shut in here. It’s all very well to pick a few of these fellows off with one’s rifle, but we want to make a really serious impression on them, and that without delay.”

“ A very good idea, and the sooner it can be carried out the better,” replied the other, looking up for a moment from the gun he was sighting

“The fact is we must have that gun, which they have mounted since the morning, taken by some means, or it will knock us to pieces. Ready—fire!”

“Bravo!” sang out Slingsby, as the shot struck the obnoxious piece, and for a time at any rate put it out of action. “That’s capital, and your sighting——”

But it was useless to continue, for the unfortunate officer fell back insensible, shot through the brain with a rifle-ball, the effect being so immediate that he never moved again.

‘Poor fellow!’ exclaimed Slingsby; “and what a serious loss! Ah! there’s the General.”

At this moment a sudden flash of irregular light burst forth at the gate, accompanied by a low boom that shook the earth, while a perfect tempest of shot and shell rent the air, seeming to make it impossible for any creature to live under it. This, combined with the shouting and execrations of the soldiers, the shrieking of the women and children, the groans of the wounded and dying, the tumbling

to pieces of huge masses of the masonry of the old building loosened and shaken down by the bombardment, and the rush forward through the partially blown-in gateway of hundreds of the enemy, made Slingsby recognise that not a moment must be lost if the position were to be saved. Without waiting for orders, therefore, he rapidly descended into the square, mounted his horse, and, hastily forming his Lancers into line, charged the seething mass of assailants with fiery impetuosity. The effect was instantaneous, for the enemy had not thought of the possibility of a Cavalry charge, and recoiled from it in consternation, leaving many of their number prostrate and dying, while the main body retreated from the gate amid a well-directed and destructive fire from the rifles of the Red Dirks.

“Right well done!” shouted Slingsby, looking over his shoulder and smiling grimly at the Seikhs. “Now—form threes—forward!”

They passed rapidly under the archway, once clear of which their Captain drew them up in line

under the wall of the serai, and halted them for an instant's breathing space. In front his practised eye detected the retreating line of the enemy, and noted the howdahs of more than one in authority among them leading the way to a less exposed position; but even as he gazed an unaccountable change came over them, the direction of their movement altered, and a strange confusion seized them.

This was the moment favourable for his purpose, and Slingsby, putting up his glass, gave the word to advance at a trot; then, as they came within charging distance, he dashed headlong at them, the Seikhs shrieking wildly as they delivered their impetuous attack. Each lance found a bloody sheath for its point, and then tulwars were drawn and proved even more effective in the hand-to-hand fighting that ensued.

"Five thousand rupees to him who captures the Nawab!" shouted Slingsby, as, at the head of some half-dozen of his best men, among whom was the old warrior Heera Singh ever to the fore he

penetrated far into the ranks of the enemy and drew rein for the first time near a group of the leaders of the insurgents. "Five thousand rupees for the Nawab, dead or alive!"

There was in the centre of the party they had just come upon a young man, very handsomely dressed, whom Slingsby shrewdly suspected to be the pretended Prince himself. Mounted on a handsome little bay Arab, the unfortunate youth had ridden forth that evening deeming victory certain, for, as the well-equipped force under his command advanced under cover of its big guns to the attack, it seemed absurd to doubt that the handful of English cooped up within the serai, terribly burdened as it was with its women and children, should be overborne and annihilated by the hostile host. Yet, at the very moment when victory seemed assured and the hated usurpers must be finally swept from the earth and exterminated, the sudden charge of the Seikhs had inspired in the over-confident assailants a panic that the example and exhortations of their leaders were

utterly unable to check, changing their bold onslaught into a retreat to at any rate the temporary shelter of the rising ground behind which their guns had been originally stationed. There, probably, a rally would have taken place, but that just as they reached the desired position they were met by the impetuous onset of another force, which, falling like a flash of lightning on their flank and penetrating through and through their broken ranks, split them up into three or four wavering masses, some of the units of which made here and there a plucky hand-to-hand resistance, but whose main constituents, happy as they had felt in their one-sided and treacherous attack on the English in the morning, had no stomach for a struggle in which the opponents appeared likely to take a bloody revenge on them.

And, yet, had the Nawab and his army known that the fierce assault which so shook them was the charge of but a dozen wild Pathans under the young Walter Spencer, they would not ignominiously have quailed before it, or wavered and

broken in the manner that had so astonished Slingsby.

The latter had hardly, he thought, made his offer of reward heard amid the clamour and shouting, the rattling of the musketry, the booming of the guns, and was about to penetrate the flying group of horse-men and attempt himself to seize the young fellow who rode in their midst, when a weird and uncouth figure, with unkempt hair and pugaree streaming out behind, striding a wiry Caubul horse which he was urging to its utmost speed, galloped up, and furiously dashing at the Nawab struck at him with his tulwar, and with a single stroke severed his head from his body.

“Shābāsh!” yelled the strange assailant, looking round to see the effect of his blow, and pulling up at last close to where Slingsby stood. “Shābāsh, Nawab-Sahib! That cut was not learnt in vain, though I little thought I should practise it on so eminent a neck as yours!”

“Why, Ghoolam Ali,” cried Slingsby, “this is a lucky meeting! But you are not alone, some of the Pathans are with you?”

“Salaam, sahib!” exclaimed the other, delighted to greet his commander at this auspicious moment. “Pardon my charging up so close to your honour, but this horse’s mouth is hard, and I had had to make him gallop.”

“Gallop, indeed!” said Slingsby, admiringly. “Why, with that wonderful stroke of yours you have rid us of the head not only of the poor boy Nawab but of the whole rebellion in these parts; and right well you deserve the reward, for see how they are scuttling off right and left!”

Ghoolan Ali grinned from ear to ear.

“Tell me,” continued Slingsby, “how came you so opportunely to our assistance, and what lucky chance led you to single out the Nawab so unerringly?”

“Their camp was open to every comer, so certain were they of victory, and I was kept fully aware of their plans, which of course I communicated to Spencer-sahib,” replied the Pathan.

“Spencer-sahib here!” echoed Slingsby in amazement, turning round in his saddle, and wav-

ing his sword to rally the Seikhs for another charge.

“Hah! sahib. He it was that led us, me and my men, on to the attack just now, for we knew you were hard pressed and in a desperate case,” said Ghoolam Ali.

“Why, here is Spencer-sahib with some of the men, sure enough!” exclaimed Slingsby, as a party of the Lancers came galloping wildly up. “Halloa, Spencer!”

“Glad to see you, Slingsby,” cried Walter, reining-in his horse; “though hardly so much surprised as you are to encounter me, I expect! Now I yield up my command to you, and have nothing but praise for every man among them.”

Warm greetings were passing between the Pathans and Seikhs, delighted as they were to meet again under such happy circumstances; but there was still work to be done, and Slingsby lost no time in forming his men up and leading them at a gallop after the retreating foe, Spencer charging with them under his friend's orders.

And now one of those things happened which mars a victory, even in the moment of its attainment. The Seikhs and Pathans had behaved admirably that afternoon, sustaining but small loss during their hard fighting and repeated and reckless charges under their gallant young leaders, Slingsby and Spencer, who had also passed unscathed through the ordeal, for the latter had thought nothing of the wound in the hand he had received early in the day in his encounter with Secunder Khan. But, whether owing to the loss of blood it had occasioned, slight though it was, or to the intense excitement and fatigue of the last few hours, sure it is that, while riding at a gigantic trooper who met him in full career, his vision failed him, he reeled in his saddle, and in falling headlong to the ground received a terrible slash near the left shoulder, his adversary's razor-like sword cutting deeply into his chest. His chance of life seemed a poor one, and, indeed, the fellow would have finished him off without scruple, as he lay there helpless, had not Slingsby, who was close at hand,

charged him without hesitation and with the utmost impetuosity, causing him to topple over and fall mortally wounded within a few feet of where Spencer lay.

“Now, help me !” cried Slingsby, throwing himself off his horse, and coming to his friend’s assistance. “Help me, Heera Singh, with the sahib, for he is grievously wounded, and I fear may bleed to death.”

Willing hands soon lifted Walter Spencer, and supported him as he sat on the ground to have his injury examined and an artery tied by Dalrymple, the surgeon, who was close by, and Pathans and Seikhs vied with each other in fanning the young fellow with extemporised punkahs, in bringing water for him to drink, and in offering other little attentions, for which he was very grateful. Though not belonging to their regiment, he had won the hearts of these rough soldiers by his skill in leading them to the attack at the right moment, and by his daring and reckless courage against the enemy.

But it was evident the shock of the dreadful wound was more than the young fellow could bear, and Dalrymple warned Slingsby how little hope there was. Indeed, Spencer himself felt his final hour had come, and could only whisper to his friend his last wishes.

"I'm going, Edward—I feel I'm going—that I shall soon be with her—with Lilian, I mean," he murmured, faintly.

"With Lilian!" exclaimed Slingsby, amazed. "Lilian Langford, do you mean? We have so wondered where she is, and now you seem to know——"

Spencer put up his hand, and drew his friend to him.

"She is—dead," he muttered, under his breath. "Lily left me—this—morning. Ask Chahni—how. She knows all."

"Walter, is this really true?" cried Slingsby. "And you are dying—that is what you would express?"

Spencer looked earnestly at him, but spoke not

for some moments. Then, with a final effort, he whispered gently a few more words.

"She died—in my arms—Edward. Now—I shall see—her—shall meet—her—*there!*"

Slingsby took his friend's hand in his, and gently grasped it.

"My poor Walter!" he cried, "I perceive what you mean, though as yet I do not fully understand it all."

"My father—and—Edith!" continued faintly the fast-sinking man. "My—last, dear—love—to—them. Do—not—forget—Ed——."

But he was gone; his brave young spirit had fled, and Edward Slingsby knew that at that moment he had lost the noblest and best of his friends. Yet there was no time to dwell on this, for the Cavalry were again called to instant action on account of the enemy's showing signs of rallying, and it was not till their leader had followed the rebels up in hot pursuit and charged through them again and again, that, their spirit being at length finally broken, the formidable host that

had so lately threatened the little garrison with destruction was converted into a disorganised and panic-struck crowd.

What became of those mutinous regiments, stained as many of them were with the blood of the officers who had for years been their best friends and had in many a hard fight led them gallantly to victory, it were difficult to say. Without their European leaders they became little better than an armed rabble, which, joining the remnant of the army of the pretended Nawab, passed away Northwards, leaving the town and district of Jahmere free to settle down again into their ordinary quietude and peace. Not, indeed, that the marks of what took place on that memorable day have even yet been effaced, for though new houses have been erected there are at many points green mounds that show the spots where stood Colonel Scott's and the other bungalows, while the old serai that played so useful a part in preserving from destruction the English and their faithful adherents as well as all the Government

treasure and records, remains a massive ruin, whose blackened gateway bears witness to the formidable assault that might probably have met with success, but for Slingsby's well-timed charge.

When that officer returned to the Treasury at the head of his victorious Lancers, the night was far advanced, and there was nothing to be done except rest both horses and men for some hours ; but with morning light the cantonment was visited, and the bodies of those that had fallen were brought in and laid reverently in a tent near the churchyard, ready for the service to be performed in the evening. There was placed Colonel Scott, a benevolent smile still marking his kindly face in spite of the cruel death he had died ; there, beside him, was laid his beautiful niece, her regular features seeming more delicately striking and wax-like than ever against the background of her dark and splendid hair ; there, close by, lay stretched the gallant young Spencer, his fingers tightly closed over the little silver phial that had saved Lilian Langford from dishonour, though at the cost to her

lover of all that rendered life most precious ; and there, too, the mutilated body of the unfortunate Delmar, side by side with the corpses of many a brave soldier who had fallen in the deadly struggle. And, separated only by a short space from their European companions, were seen the faithful ones among the native troops who had fought and died in performance of their oaths, refusing to the last to become traitors to their salt and to be drawn aside from their duty by threats of vengeance or by promises of loot. There was Heera Singh's nephew, brought by his uncle from the spot at the gateway of the General's garden where he had fallen, and there, too, many another good Seikh or Pathan, together with a few Poorbeahs and Rajpoots, who had successfully withstood the terrible temptations held out to them, and met their death in open combat with their own fathers and brothers, of whose defection they were ashamed and whose treachery they deplored. Among these was to be reckoned the old bearer Bhagut, who had died true to his duty and to his mistress's interests, and

whose faults, serious as they no doubt were, could only be attributed to his race and to his rearing, while his virtues—courage, faithfulness and devotion—had been all his own.

It was an impressive scene, that funeral of so many brave men, and of the one woman, the fated Lilian, which passed at sunset into the little churchyard at Jahmere, the mournful procession, headed by the band of the Red Dirks playing the “Dead March,” and every officer and civilian, from General Davis and the Commissioner downwards, following ; while Heera Singh, Ghoolam Ali Khan, and many more of the men who had honoured him beyond their own father and mother, stood near to see the last of their revered Colonel, and of the dear Missy-baba whom they had known and loved from her childhood upwards. There, too, stood the faithful Chahni, and the boy Kulloo, both in terrible grief at the fate of the mistress who had ever been to them the kindest of benefactors.

Yet the last regretful look had hardly been given to the dead, the smoke of the last volley fired over

them had barely cleared away, when a despatch was put into the General's hand urgently asking for aid to be instantly sent to Ahtabad, before which place a great host of the enemy had suddenly appeared, investing it closely and threatening to overwhelm its scanty garrison by their boldness and determination.

"Slingsby," said the General, as they walked away together; "it seems too bad to call on you so soon again, but I have alarming news from Ahtabad, and feel bound to help them if I can."

"Yes," answered Slingsby; "Bryce has whispered a word to me of this."

"I can't spare the Red Dirks, burdened as we are here by women and children, and with the Treasury and civil station to look after, but you and your Lancers shall go."

"Thank your, sir, we shall be delighted!" cried Slingsby; "and I hope we may give a good account of the enemy."

"That I am sure you will do if you get the

chance," replied the General. "Now, how many can you muster, and when can you be off?"

"I know the men by heart now," answered Slingsby, smiling quietly, "and can answer for thirty lances; and as to the time, why we can march within the hour."

"Capital!" exclaimed the General. "In that case I think you may be reckoned on to avert a disaster, for my intelligence is to the effect that the little party there will fight to the last man."

"We will do our best, sir," said Slingsby; "you may depend on us for that."

"I know by the experience of yesterday what your best is," rejoined the General, "and have little doubt you will rival it to-morrow at Ahtabad."

General Davis was right. The little band that half-an-hour later rode forth and was presently lost amid the dust that as usual blew in clouds on the well-known road previously followed by Moody and Spencer, fulfilled its destiny, and won for itself a name for gallant and heroic deeds distinguished even above other names in that time when such

deeds were of common and every-day occurrence ; while its commander, after passing unscathed through countless dangers, gained the highest rewards that it was possible to heap upon him.

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It was some two years after these events that a quiet wedding took place in Otterington church, when Colonel Edward Slingsby, V.C., was united to Edith Spencer, sole heiress to the old Baronet, her father. There was a touch of sadness pervading the proceedings, for those engaged in them could not forget the dear ones they had lost in the terrible year of Fifty-seven ; yet Sir George cheered up as he reflected that his daughter's husband was the man of all others he would have wished her to marry, while to Edward and Edith it has ever since appeared as if their true happiness in life had only begun on that bright summer's morning.



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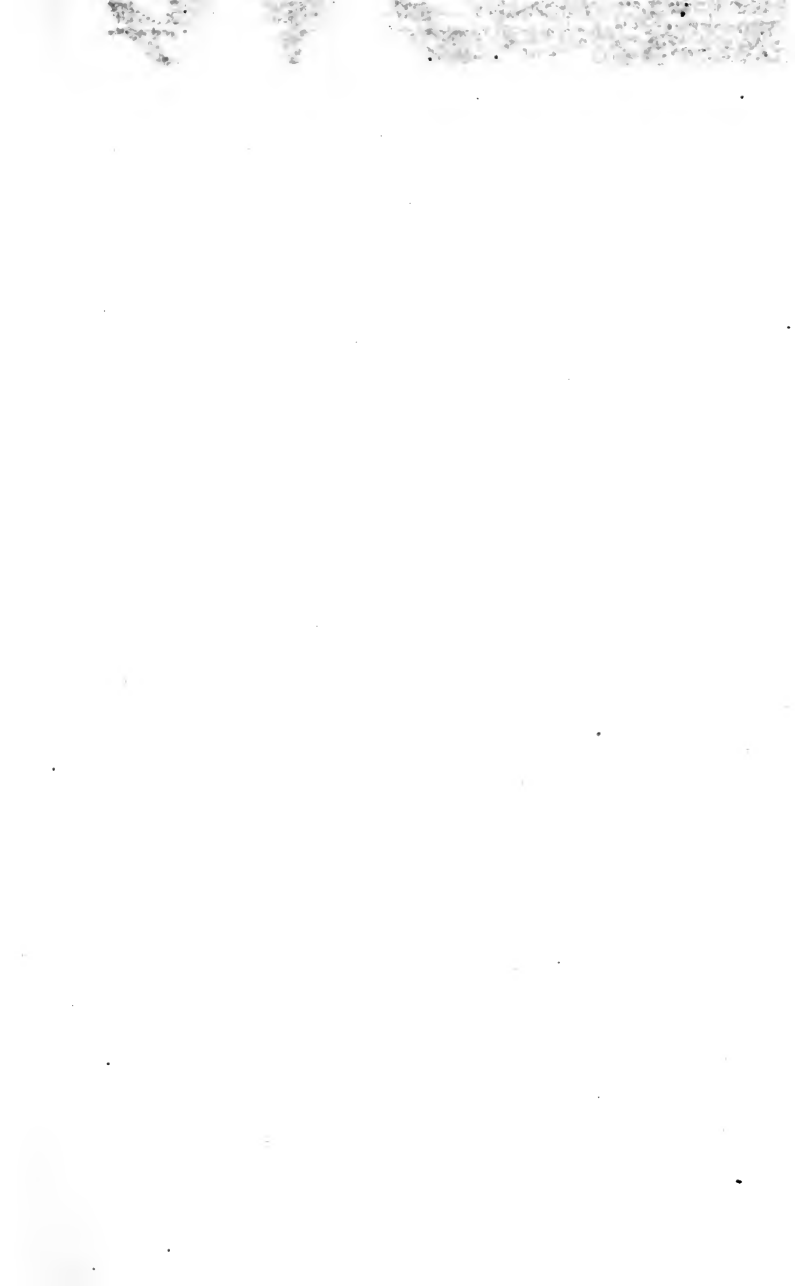
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